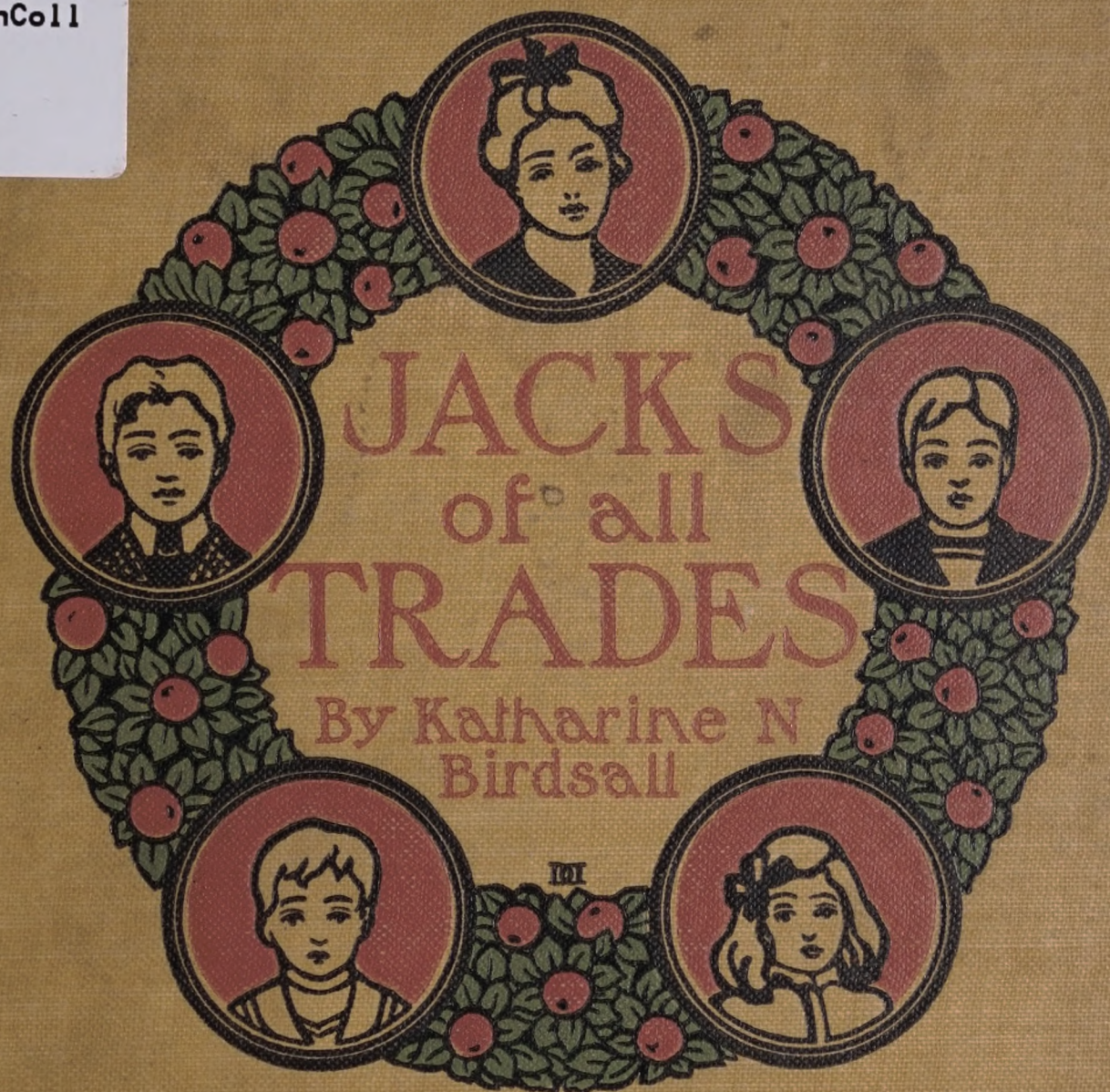


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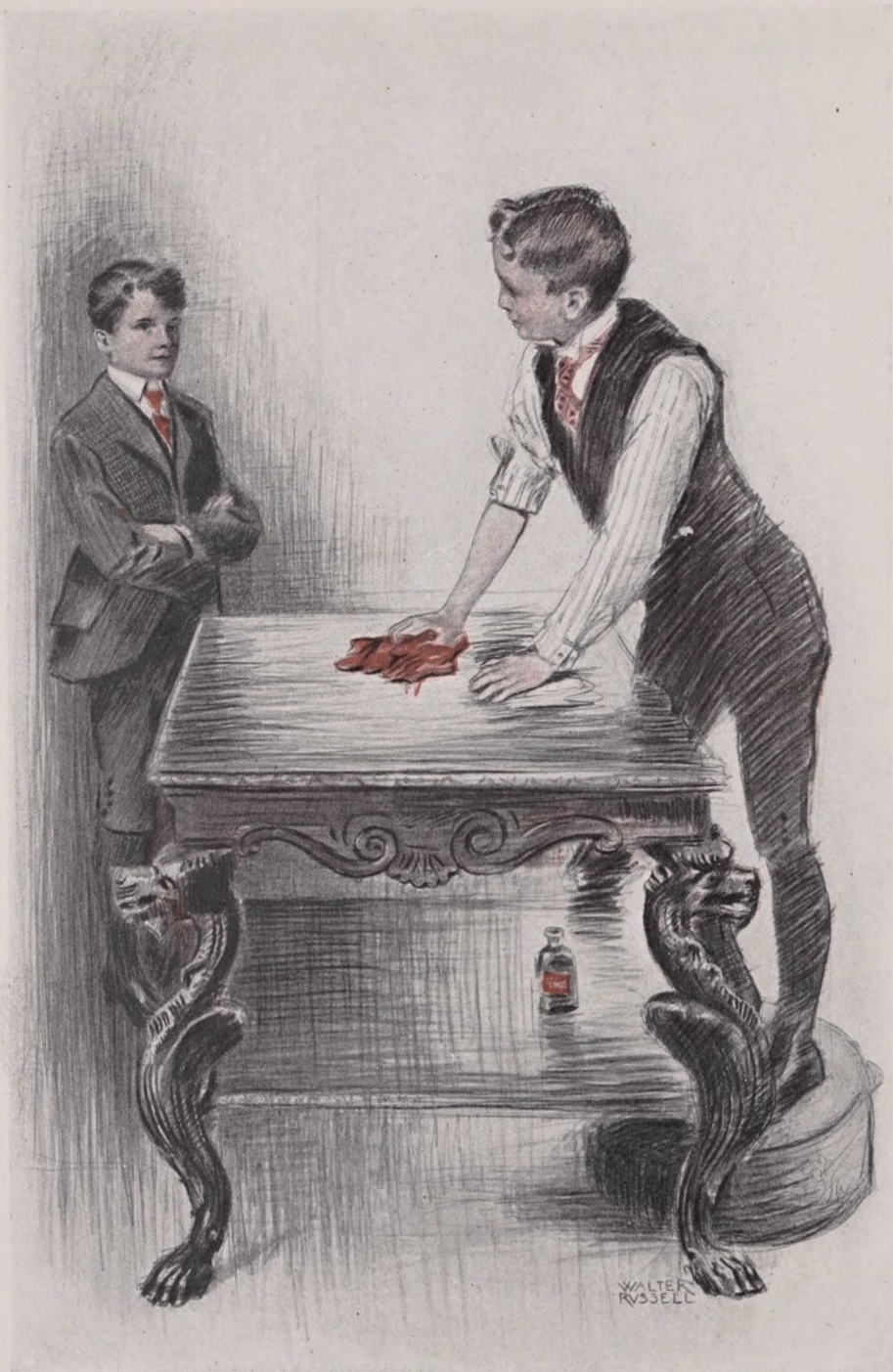
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JACKS OF ALL TRADES



“Say, wouldn’t you rather come out?”

(See page 27.)

JACKS OF ALL TRADES

AND WHAT THEY DID

A STORY

BY

KATHARINE NEWBOLD BIRDSALL

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLORS BY

WALTER RUSSELL

AND TEXT DRAWINGS BY

E. S. TRUMAN



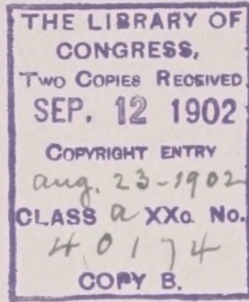
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TO
TWO
LITTLE
KATHARINES.

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JACKS OF ALL TRADES

CHAPTER I

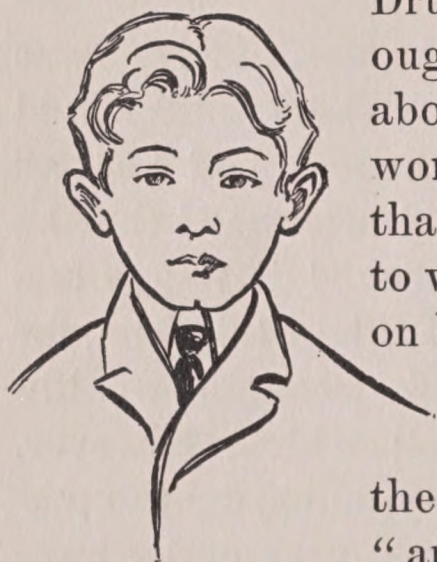
INTRODUCED BY THE NEIGHBORS

D R. SEBASTIAN McKINNEY was astounded when the minister told him that the Drurys had lost all their money. He said afterward that he never would have believed it if any one other than the minister had told him, for the Drurys had been for years the wealthiest people in Cicero ; which, however, was not saying so very much, for the majority of Cicerites could very easily have spent more without being in uncomfortable luxury. The Drurys had always had everything they wanted—from Mr. Drury down to baby Polly ; but Mr. Drury had died six months before we become acquainted with the family, and since that time things had been at sixes and sevens

in the Drury household. The money had not been securely invested, and now, as the minister was telling the doctor, there was little, if any, left.

"And what they will do is more than I know," finished the Rev. Mr. Manning.

"Haven't they any relatives who can help them?" asked the doctor. "Mrs.



Drury is so delicate she ought not to be worried about anything. Poor woman, she has more than enough to attend to with the five children on her hands!"

"That boy Jack is a bright lad," said the minister slowly, "and it must be a blow

to him to give up thinking about college. Why, doctor, he's been looking forward for years to entering Harvard next year, and he has studied for it faithfully. Only just fifteen, too, and bright as a steel trap. You can depend upon it he will find a way of helping to provide for the family.

You know I have been teaching Jack Latin and mathematics, and I've grown to admire him greatly.—No, thank you, nothing more for me.” And Mr. Manning folded his napkin carefully and leaned back in his chair.

He and Dr. McKinney were the greatest of cronies, and regularly each Friday night they dined together, first at the parsonage and then at the doctor's little vine-covered cottage. They had dined together in this way for five years, never missing a single Friday night, though the doctor was apt to be called away sometimes in the middle of the meal. He was the best-natured old bachelor in the world, and he had the tenderest of hearts; so when he was called to leave his good dinner he went with only a regretful sigh.

“Well, they're all nice children, there's no doubt of that,” assented the doctor, “though at times they *are* pretty lively. I don't know what trick that rascal Ben hasn't played on me in the last year. And Jack was no bad hand at a trick a

year ago, either. What do you suppose his last one was? I was mad as a hornet." The doctor laughed and his eyes twinkled merrily.

"That's the trouble with you, doctor—you're angry one minute and the next minute you're twice as good-natured as you were in the first place; and a boy with Jack's wit discovered that soon enough, I'll warrant. If you were only severe once it would stop the boys' tricks, though I think Jack doesn't take as much interest in them as he did."

"No," laughed the doctor. "His last was nearly a year ago, and I've never mentioned it to a soul. It was one night in January. I had finished my dinner and was very busy writing my annual report, which had to be sent in the next day, when in came old Joshua Lane to have his knee bandaged. Then came an old woman, and then the carpenter to have his splintered arm examined; and when I was in the midst of all this, Hester came to tell me that a little girl was crying at the door and wanted to see me.

She was a dirty little minx, and her grimy cheeks were streaked where the tears had run down. She said between her sobs that her old grandmother was very sick and didn't want to die without a doctor, and would I please come at once. She was a stranger to me, but I told her to wait for five minutes and I would go with her. So I finished with the patients, and put my report away only half written.

"It was a very dark night, and from what I could gather from her story, she had walked miles for me. So Nebuchadnezzar was harnessed, and in a few minutes the girl—who said her name was Sally Dodd—and I were driving rapidly toward Willow Creek. We had driven about an hour, turning as she directed, and were far out in the country when I began to think she had lost the way. But she declared she hadn't, and I swallowed my misgivings. About four miles farther on she began to whimper again, and finally sobbed in a heartrending way that she guessed she was lost—she never had

ridden over the road before, and perhaps if she got out and walked she would remember it. So against my better judgment I let her out. She went on ahead for a few minutes in the darkness, calling to me to follow, and then she said she had found it—there were cross-roads ahead and I must turn to the left.”

The doctor paused to light his pipe, and Mr. Manning pulled up his customary easy-chair to the window and settled himself for a couple of hours’ solid comfort.

“Did you get there in time to save the grandmother?” he asked sympathetically.

“Well,” answered the doctor, “there were cross-roads sure enough, and I turned to the left as she had told me. But the poor little thing must have lost herself, for those were the last words she spoke. Nebuchadnezzar and I wandered up and down that country road, looking for Sally Dodd and calling to her, for two mortal hours, I should think, with never a sound to guide us. Then suddenly I

stumbled on something soft and warm in a corner by a stone wall——”

“*Poor* little soul!” interrupted the minister compassionately. “I suppose she had fainted from exhaustion—probably she had nothing to eat that day, with her grandmother so sick.”

“Probably not,” continued Dr. McKinney dryly. “But it didn’t happen to be the little girl—it was a bundle of old clothes. And I had the curiosity to light a match and look at them. There was a torn little dress, an old ragged shawl, and the remains of a straw hat—the very same the little girl had worn. I was puzzled for a few minutes, and then the truth flashed over me.”



“What?” asked the minister.

“Jack Drury!” said the doctor solemnly, while a smile broke on the minister’s face. “Yes,” he continued, slap-

ping his knees heartily. "Jack Drury; and he had led me such a distance from home that I was completely twisted, and it was after twelve o'clock when I finally found myself. I didn't want to judge the boy without proof, so I had the curiosity to go over to the house early the next morning, and the first thing I saw was a pair of very muddy boots on the back porch, which I'll wager had tramped miles the night before."

Mr. Manning laughed. "Did the boy have any object in doing it?" he asked.

"Well," said the doctor, laughing too, "Master Jack and I had had a dispute a few days before. I had been foolish enough to say that for fifteen years Nebuchadnezzar and I had jogged about the country, and there was not a road within fifty miles that we wouldn't know in the pitch-darkness even if we were blindfolded. Jack expressed his opinion that *he* could show me a place I could get lost in. The more positive he was the more I laughed; and I was so posi-

tive I refused to let him show me. Hence my suspicions."

"I suppose you left a piece of your mind with him the next time you saw him," suggested the minister.

The doctor laughed again. "No—that would never have done," he said; "but—I prefer girls. Give me Miss Katrine with her nimble fingers—or the little butter-ball of a Polly—girls for me always. Poor little things! it will be hard for them, this money business.



I wish I were a rich man and I'd adopt the two girls."

"It's probably well for them that you're not rich," said Mr. Manning. "Don't worry about them, though; *they'll* do something besides worry, I'll warrant."

CHAPTER II

WHAT THEY DID

THEY hardly did just what Mr. Manning would have expected, though. There was a family conclave held one morning in the great sunshiny sitting-room at the Rockery, as the old Drury homestead was called, and even toddling, golden-curled little Polly was admitted, and had her important say in family affairs. The comfortable cushion-covered couch was drawn to the sunshine in the bay window, and Mrs. Drury, in her pretty gray wrapper, was helped out by Katrine and Charlie. Mrs. Drury had been almost an invalid for a couple of years, and when her husband died the shock had sent her to her bed. She was just getting a little stronger when the news came that all she had depended on for the support of her family was gone. She

was a brave little woman, though so helpless with a terrible spinal disease, and she made the best of the trouble and tried to be cheerful for the sake of her children; and the children, for fear of worrying dear Middy, as Charlie had christened her when he was a baby, laughed and sang and played as if nothing had happened to mar their pleasure. Jack, Katrine, and Ben were old enough to realize what it meant to lose all one's money, but, of course, Charlie, who was only seven, and three-year-old Polly, didn't understand much about it, except that they found their dear mother crying once in awhile, and noticed that when she was in her own room the spirits of the others drooped.

"We might as well begin at once, Middy," said Jack, "and get things settled; mightn't we?"

"Yes, dear," replied Mrs. Drury, with one of her brave bright smiles. "We might as well face the truth right away and see what can be done. You are the man of the family now, and you

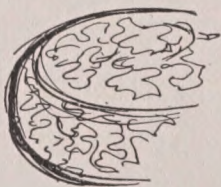
have a precious charge to look after the others."

"You forget me, Middy," said Ben, leaving the stool on which he had been sitting, throwing his head back and putting his hands in his pockets. "*I am a man, too.*"



Middy smiled. "You will be very soon, my son. But you will have to become more thoughtful and careful before that time."

"*I'm* a man, too," said Charlie, looking up from the rug where he and Polly were playing. "He isn't, Middy — he's



'laughing Benny,' and men don't laugh."

"You're a kid!" retorted Ben, "and you——"

"Never mind," cried Katrine, "that isn't what we want to talk about."

"Me's man," declared Polly, rubbing her big brown eyes thoughtfully. "Bid man."

"You're a sweetheart," said Katrine. "That's what you are."

"'Es; me tweetheart," assented Polly sweetly.

"You are all brave children," said Mrs. Drury. "And we need to be brave, because it is a serious thing to try to live without money, especially when there are so many mouths to feed and so many feet to be shod. Your poor old mother isn't good for much, or she would go to work and earn enough to support you." Katrine, who was sitting on the floor by the couch, flung her arms about her mother's neck, and Jack squeezed her hand affectionately.



"Don't say that, Middy," said Jack. "What could we do without you? You mustn't even *think* of such a thing. I'll find something to do, and work it with all my might."

“You are the queen bee,” said Katrine, “and we will be your subjects—the busy bees.”

“Buzz-zz-zzzz,” remarked Polly.

“And queen bees don’t work a bit,” cried Ben. “So you needn’t feel a bit badly about it.”

“Bad!” corrected Jack. “If I could go to the city,” he continued, turning toward his mother, “I’m sure I’d find something to do that would bring in some money. It would be easy enough, Middy. Will you let me go?”

“I think not, dear,” said his mother gently. “It sounds very easy when you talk about it, but it is not as attractive as it looks. A boy of your age does not get more than three dollars a week at the most, and city office work would be very irksome to a country boy like you. Still, I know you wouldn’t mind that when working for our sakes. But think, dear, for a moment; you would have to board if you went to the city, and even without any new clothes your poor little three dollars would be eaten long before the

end of the week. Three dollars will go much farther in the country than in the city. So I think you would better look for your fortune at home, dear."

"There doesn't seem to be much to do at home," said Jack, "except to run errands for people who would much rather do them themselves."

"We might start in some kind of business," suggested Katrine.

"Let's have a candy shop," cried Ben, at which Charlie pricked up his ears, and Polly cried, "Me too."

"We might have a bakery," agreed Katrine thoughtfully, "and make some candy, too."

"Yes," said Jack dryly. "I'd make a fine cook, wouldn't I? I say, let's have a carpenter shop—I am handy with tools, and Ben is too."

"*I'd* make a fine carpenter," retorted Katrine. "Let's be carpenters, by all means."

"Let's be a postman," cried Charlie. "Just hear me whistle," and he blew such a deafening blast on his sailor's whistle

that Middy clapped her hands over her ears, and Jack, catching him up, vowed

he should go out of the room if he made another sound.



"Me be a mi'k-man," declared Polly, when peace was restored, plainly showing where her affections were placed.

When they had finished laughing at Polly's proposal, Jack suggested that they might keep a general shop where anything could be done that was needed. "We can be sort of handy-men," he said, "and always ready to do whatever any one wants done. Then Katrine can be a baker if she wants to, Charlie can be postman, Ben and I can be carpenters, and Polly can be milk-man."

The others laughed and clapped their hands delightedly, and Mrs. Drury smiled.

"You might be able to do something

of the sort," she said thoughtfully. "I'm sure there are lots of people who want odd things done. I can remember times long ago when I would have been very glad to find some one to call upon to put on rebellious door-knobs, or run an errand, or do my baking when I was worn out. Yes, I think that you will be able to make a success of the plan if you try. You must make it a point to do everything you undertake in the very best manner, and be reasonable in your charges, though. You must also let people know that you want work. Every one will be surprised, no doubt, but we are all brave, and we do not care what others think or say as long as we are doing right. This may be the silver lining to our cloud—who knows?" And Middy smiled brightly.



"I can print a lot of cards," cried Ben.

"And I will give 'em to people!" shouted Charlie. "O Middy, do, *do* let us. It'll be lots of fun." Charlie was jumping up and down in his excitement.

"You can't do anything if you make so much noise," said Jack. "You must remember that Middy has a headache. Yes, you can be postman and help Ben give out the cards when we have them printed—I'll show you what to put on them, Ben."

Charlie opened his mouth to shriek with delight, but his big brother promptly clapped a hand over it, deposited him in the hall, and closed the door.

Then the family set to work to compose a suitable business notice. Jack submitted this as his first attempt:

"The Drurys wish to announce that they will do work of every kind at reasonable rates. Errands executed promptly. The Rockery, Cicero."

"That will never do," said Mrs. Drury. "In the first place, the Rockery is too far from the center of the town for people to

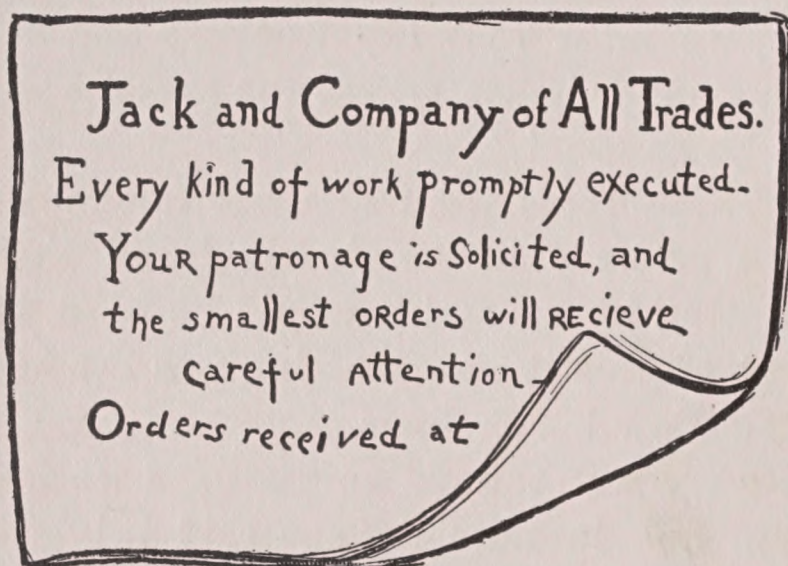
come out here to get some one to run an errand. And then"—she hesitated a little, as if it were something disagreeable she had to say—"and then, you know, if we can, we must rent the Rockery and live in a smaller house, where the expense will not be as great."

Three faces were clouded for an instant. The children dearly loved their beautiful home, and it would be hard, indeed, to give it up. Katrine was the first to swallow her feelings.

"We won't have to go until we find some one to take it," she said brightly. "A smaller house will be much less trouble to manage, too; won't it, Middy?"

Jack didn't speak for a few minutes. The possibility of having to leave the Rockery had never occurred to him, and it was anything but a pleasant thought. There seemed to be nothing to say about that, so he only said that they would have to get an "office" in the center of the town, and that one of them must be there all the time to take orders.

The notice Katrine composed was the best of all, and finally, with a few amendments, it was unanimously adopted :



CHAPTER III

THE FIRST CUSTOMER

BEN proved himself such an efficient printer that the cards he and Charlie left at every door for miles around were read with interest and amusement. Very few of the townspeople had heard of the Drurys' unfortunate loss, and when they read the notice they laughed.

"What under the sun won't those Drurys do next!" they exclaimed. "I wonder if any one will patronize them!"

Jack made an arrangement with the druggist by which his "Company" was allowed to have desk room in a corner of the drug-store in return for a certain number of errands to be done every week. He was elected president of the Company by a unanimous vote when the scheme was first mentioned; Katrine was the treasurer because she could always make

a column of figures foot up the same amount three times out of five; and laughing Ben was the secretary. Perhaps he was rather young for a secretary, but it was necessary to give him some influential position to save his feelings, and as things turned out he proved a great acquisition. There was only one drawback to the position, and that was the promise Jack had extorted from him that he would not send any letter out until he had first looked in the dictionary for the correct spelling of every word. And it is due to Ben to say that he kept his promise quite well, considering what a bad memory he had. Charlie was promised as many letters to deliver as he wanted—more, in fact. But he cheerfully agreed to be postman until he “wore his legs off.” He didn’t have very much work for the first week, except when the telephone refused to perform its duty, for Jack and Ben had rigged up a beautiful telephone between the office and the house. It refused to act quite as well as could have been wished, for the distance

was longer than was suited to the materials they had in hand. And Charlie was so excited, and so worried for fear a possible letter might escape him, that he made many journeys to and fro. Finally Jack had to order him to stay at home, for a breathless small boy rushing in every half-hour to inquire for business that didn't come rather disturbed the president's equanimity, and he was afraid that Mr. Pills might repent of his bargain, and refuse to allow him desk room longer.

Jack spent most of his time at his desk—one that he had made himself—and studied nearly



all day. The desk was a very creditable piece of work; Jack had selected oak for the wood, and it was planed and polished till the beautiful marks of the

grain were brought out as in a most expensive piece of "store" furniture. The pieces were cleverly and smoothly put together, and everything was finished in the best style. The work on the desk had brought him a prize in the manual-training department at school, and he hated to put it to so common a use; it brought him his first customer, however.

It was the morning of the third day he had spent at the office, when he noticed a tall, fine-looking man enter the store, and, after buying some drugs, start for the door. As he passed Jack's desk he stopped and looked at it closely; then he turned to the druggist.

"I wish we had a cabinet-maker near here who could polish like that," he said. "I have a beautiful old table that needs attention, but I wouldn't trust Jim Barnes with it."

"Perhaps——" commenced Mr. Pills, looking toward the corner; but before he had a chance to say another word Jack had bounded from his seat, scatter-

ing his books and papers, and was handing a card to the stranger.

"At your service, sir," he said. "I made that desk."

"*You!*" was the amazed reply.

Jack had such a straightforward, honest way of talking that it didn't take Mr. Waldron long to place confidence in him, and he engaged the services of the new "Company." And as Jack volunteered to go at once, he summoned Katrine from the house by telephone, much to Mr. Waldron's amusement, and was ready to start when he had been home to get his tools. Mr. Waldron was going right to his home, and Jack was to meet him and drive out, a distance of about nine miles. He was surprised to find that Mr. Waldron had known his father when they were boys, and that they had gone through college together.

"I have a son and a daughter near your age," said Mr. Waldron, "but I am afraid they are not as talented as you are. Paul would make a sad botch of polishing my antique table."

"Perhaps his talents run in a different direction," suggested Jack politely, wondering if he would see Paul Waldron and his sister.

The Waldron home was a large, fascinating house about a hundred and fifty years old, and its furniture matched it. Jack was almost afraid to touch the beautiful old mahogany table. He waited in the dining-room until Mrs. Waldron was called, and when she came in he rose politely.

"Oh," said Mrs. Waldron, "I was looking for the man to polish the table. Are you waiting to see Paul?"

"I am the man to polish the table," said Jack, smiling.

"There must be a mistake," said Mrs. Waldron perplexedly, looking at Jack; but just then her husband came in and explained that, although very youthful in appearance, Jack's work was that of an artist. Mrs. Waldron still looked a little doubtful, but she did not say anything more; so Jack went to work, slowly and carefully. A slight mistake on his part

might ruin forever the handsome old piece of furniture, not to mention ruining his reputation. The Waldrons seemed to be pleased with his slowness, however, and came in frequently to see how he was progressing.

At half-past twelve he was beginning to feel very hungry indeed, as the rattling of the dishes in the dining-room across the hall reminded him that he had not thought to bring his lunch. While he was thinking about it the library door opened; and Paul Waldron, a delicate-looking, dark-haired boy, came in carrying a small pitcher.

"Sally made me bring this in," he said apologetically. "I thought you'd rather come out in the dining-room to lunch, but she said she was sure you'd rather have it here since you didn't know any of us. Say, wouldn't you rather come out? It's the meeting of the 'March Hares.'"

"What *are* the March Hares?" asked Jack. "I am terribly hungry, but I never thought to bring my lunch."

A tray spread with the daintiest cloth and with eatables and goodies galore appeared at that moment, carried by a laughing girl.

"Wait, Sally," called her brother. "Say, Jack—your name's Jack, isn't it?—wouldn't you rather come in with the March Hares? There are only eight of us in the club."

"I didn't expect to come to a party," laughed Jack. "I'm a day-laborer and I'm not fit to be seen. If you don't mind, I'd rather stay here."

"There! Who knew the most, Mr. Knowitall?" laughed Sally. "Set the milk pitcher down and get a glass—I didn't have room for it on the tray." She put the tray on a little side-table, and Jack fell to eating ravenously; everything was as good as it was dainty. Sally ran back to the dining-room, and when Paul brought the glass Jack asked what the "March Hares" were.

"Why it's sort of hard to explain just what we are," said Paul. "We're a club of four girls and four boys, and we started

in to have a secret society just for fun ; then we decided to be missionaries ; and then we started a dancing-class ; and when we made up our minds to turn into a literary club, mother declared we were as mad as March hares—and so we decided to *be* ‘ March Hares.’ ”

Jack laughed till he felt like crying. “ And you do just whatever you want ? ” he asked. “ It must be fun to be a March Hare.”

“ It is,” declared Paul. “ You must come over some time—you live in Cicero, don’t you ?—and help us to be mad. I must go and finish my grub—good-by if I don’t see you again.”

“ Good-by,” called Jack. “ Any time you want help in being mad just call upon Jack and Company of All Trades.”

Paul disappeared, and Jack destroyed the rest of the lunch in a very short time ; and then he finished his work in the most approved style. When Mr. and Mrs. Waldron came in about four o’clock, they were very much pleased with the result, and praised the workmanship highly.

"We shall remember you, Mr. Jack, whenever we want any furniture attended to," said Mr. Waldron pleasantly. "Will you send in your bill?"

"Thank you," said Jack. "Furniture or anything else, please. Yes, sir, I will send you the bill. Good afternoon."

As he started down the road on his long walk home, he caught sight of the March Hares playing some very noisy and exciting game, and he decided that they had quite abandoned being a literary club. He would have had quite a walk home had he not met Dr. McKinney.

"Lost, eh?" queried the doctor.

"No, sirree," replied Jack pleasantly. "I always have known my way about this part of the country. I was just going to strike across that field and cut through the woods for home when I saw you."

"A short cut, eh? Perhaps you'd save time by walking home, young man," said the doctor dryly, flicking Nebuchadnezzar with his whip.

Jack looked at the doctor quickly,

but his face showed no sign that he might be alluding to the midnight trick of a year ago. "I'd like to ride with you if you have no objection," said Jack.

"I should think the woods would be more attractive in the day than at night," the doctor continued, as Jack jumped in; the doctor then abruptly changed the subject, for he was afraid of "treading on his own toes."



Ben was greatly pleased to have a bill to make out, and when it was at last mailed by Charlie it was a model of penmanship, and read:

CICERO,.....190....

Mr. GEORGE WALDRON,

To JACK & Co. OF ALL TRADES, Dr.

Scraping and polishing mahogany table.....\$3 00.

CHAPTER IV

WHICH TELLS OF SOME CHANGES

WHEN Jack reached home that afternoon he found his mother looking very sad, and there was a suspicion of tears about Katrine, who had been relieved at the office by Ben. He understood what it was at once when he caught sight of an open letter on the table and saw the heading. It was from a Mr. Hewing, a rich New Yorker, who had come to Cicero a couple of weeks before to look at the Rockery, which was advertised for sale. At the time he had not seemed very much pleased with the place, and, although Mrs. Drury knew it must be done, she was quite relieved when he had left without expressing himself as pleased enough to buy it.

It was a beautiful place to live, especially for children. The house was large,

with lots of nooks and crannies and corner cupboards, and little halls, where, if you were not very careful, you would fall up or down a couple of steps at every turn. It was built on a hill that had at one time been the center of the Drurys' large property, but it did not have a smooth and rolling velvety lawn, as some people declared it ought to have. Instead, there were great boulders and scraggly rocks, and brambles and mosses and stones of every size and description. And growing near the house in wild confusion were, in summer, flowers that would have delighted the hearts of our great-grandmothers—a regular old fashioned flower-garden, minus the arrangement and perfect order our great-grandmothers loved. Mr. Drury had never allowed his gardener to interfere with the growth of nature, except to rid the immediate yard of weeds. So, perhaps it was not very wonderful that Mr. and Mrs. Hewing had not expressed themselves as delighted with the place, for they were the most civilized kind of city people, while

the Drury homestead was a bit of untrained nature.

"Well," said Jack cheerfully, picking up the letter and dropping his hat to a convenient resting-place on the floor, "have they made us an offer, Middy?"

"You may read it," replied his mother. "I suppose we ought to be very thankful, instead of near tears."

"DEAR MADAM:" the letter began. "Mrs. Hewing and I have decided that we like your house the best of any we have seen, but we do not wish to commit ourselves by buying too hastily. Therefore we propose that you rent it to us for a couple of years, with the privilege of buying it at the end of that time. Kindly let me hear whether this proposition meets your approval, and oblige,

"Yours very truly,

"GEORGE J. HEWING."

Jack whistled when he had finished reading it.

"What a little goose you are to cry, Katrine!" he said. "I should call this a

piece of very good news; shouldn't you, Middy?"

"People have been known to cry from joy," retorted Katrine, a big tear falling in her lap. "Oh, dear, I didn't really think we'd have to give up the house! I hoped somebody 'd leave us a fortune so we wouldn't have to."

"Don't be silly," said Jack. "We can buy it back in a few years, when we make enough money. This house is too big for us, anyway."

"You are right, dear," said Mrs. Drury. "The house is too large, and we ought to be thankful that we have found some one to take it, and the extra expense, off our hands. And then we can look forward to two years hence, for perhaps Mr. and Mrs. Hewing will find it undesirable to buy and we can come back again."

"I *do* hope so!" cried Katrine. "But there's no danger of that, Middy. The longer a body lives here the longer she wants to stay."

"Shall I accept Mr. Hewing's offer, then?" asked Mrs. Drury.

"Ye-es," said Jack and Katrine dolefully. "But," added Jack, "do ask 'em a high rent."

"We shall have to take what we can get," said his mother; and then she dictated a letter to Jack, and after it had been mailed, and the family had settled themselves around the supper table, they felt relieved by the thought that perhaps two years would see them in possession of the Rockery again.

"The house next to Dr. McKinney's will just suit us," said Mrs. Drury, who, for the first time in weeks, was able to be at the supper table. "The doctor told me the other day that it was vacant. It will seem small to us after the Rockery, but——"

"It's the dearest little house," interrupted Katrine. "The Blacks used to live there—don't you remember? And it is a fine place for an office, isn't it, Jack? Why—what's the matter, Mammy Rose?"

Mammy Rose was the old cook, who had been with the Drurys for many years.

She was as black as the ace of spades, and rejoiced in the name of Rose Pink. When they had lost their money Mrs. Drury had sent all the other servants away, but faithful old Mammy Rose had remained at reduced wages. When they had commenced to talk of moving, they had told Mammy nothing about it, for Mrs. Drury knew it would be impossible for them to keep her at anything like the wages she could command; for Mammy was a famous cook, and many a housekeeper would be only too glad to have her.



“O Mis’ Lucy, you-all ain’ gwine to leabe de Rock’y, is you?” she sobbed, rocking herself to and fro. “Yo’ ain’ so po’ ’s all dat, is yo’?”

“Yes, Mammy,” said Mrs. Drury gently. “We are going to rent the Rockery,

and will have to go to a smaller house in the village. And Mammy, dear old Mammy, you will have to leave us." Mrs. Drury's eyes were filled with tears, too, for Mammy Rose had been her nurse when she was a child in the old Virginia home.

Mammy pulled her apron from her head, and looked at her mistress in a frightened way.

"Sho, Mis' Lucy chile, is yo' gone crazy? Yo' cyan't lib widout Mammy Rose. No, honey, Mammy's gwine too."

"But, Mammy dear," explained Mrs. Drury, "we are so very poor now that we can not pay you what you are worth—you must go somewhere else."

"What's I care for money!" declared Mammy indignantly. "I'se neber gwine to leabe Mis' Lucy—she gwine die f'om lonesomeness." Mammy Rose left the chair into which she had cast herself at first, and threw herself on the floor beside her mistress, burying her face in Mrs. Drury's lap; and little Polly slipped from her high chair and threw her arms about

Mammy's neck, mingling her tears with the old nurse's.

"Mammy Rose, Mammy Rose!" cried Katrine. "You mustn't do that—you will make Middy ill again." But Mammy's grief was beyond control, and she sobbed as if her heart would break, while Polly burst into loud wails, and rained kisses on Mammy's dusky cheeks.

"Dear Mammy," said Mrs. Drury gently, "listen for a moment. We feel just as badly as you do about it, and it will be very hard to get along without you. But you must leave us. Who is going to support Uncle Jake and crippled George? Lily can't do it because she has a family of her own; and what would they do if you did not send them money every month?"

"Dunno, Mis' Lucy, dunno," sobbed Mammy Rose. "Dey has Topsy, but she ain' had no trainin' in serbice an' she cyan' earn much. But dey'd be better off wid Mammy livin' nor dead, an' Mammy jes' gwine *die* ef she leabe yo'."

"Oh no, Mammy," said Mrs. Drury.

"There are lots of very nice people who want you, and perhaps you could get a place near here where you could see us often. If we can get the little house next to the doctor's there will not be so very much work, and Katrine has grown to be quite a cook."

"Dat she has," assented Mammy Rose heartily, but still crying. "She ain' done been brung up by Mammy Rose fo' nuthin'."

"And Cousin Helen Cubberly is coming to stay with us for a while," added Mrs. Drury.

"Cousin Helen!" exclaimed the children in a breath.

"Yes," said their mother, "I wanted to have a delightful surprise for you, but now the cat is out of the bag."

"De good Lord be praised!" cried Mammy Rose. "Ef Mis' Helen's comin' yo'll be in good hands ef Mammy leaves yo'. Dere's nobody Mammy sooner trust yo' wif dan Mis' Helen." She wiped her eyes slowly and solemnly on her apron, disengaged Polly's arms from her neck

and hugged her close with one hand, while with the other she straightened her turban. "I reck'n yo's right, Mis' Lucy. Who's gwine gib ole Unc' Jake an' dat po' li'l' Gawdgy Washington Lafayette dey wittles ef Mammy Rose doan' earn no money?"

"You can come back, Mammy, when we make our fortune," said Ben, eying the waffle plate sadly. "Say, Katrine, do you know how to make waffles?" But Katrine was too busy buttering one for Charlie to answer the question.

Mammy Rose put Polly back in her high chair and resumed waiting on the table, but with a very sad face, and shaking her head solemnly every little while.

"Has Cousin Helen really said she will come to us?" said Katrine.

"Yes," nodded Mrs. Drury. "I had a letter asking if she could not come and make us a long visit wherever we were. She says she wants to take care of me and nurse me back to my own good health."

"As if *I* couldn't take care of you!" cried Katrine jealously.

"But you will be busy with the house-keeping and other things, dear. I am afraid you and Jack will have to leave school for the present, but Ben can go, and Charlie must start this year, too."

"But I'm secretary of the Company," objected Ben, "and I've got to work."

"You can devote your afternoons to that, after you have finished your lessons," said Mrs. Drury firmly. "It is too bad that Jack and Katrine have to stay away, but if there is anything to be made from 'Jack and Company' it must have attention."

"It will be fun, indeed it will," cried Katrine. "We don't mind it at all, do we, Jack? We can study by ourselves."

Jack couldn't answer *No* truthfully, so he chose to say nothing.

"I know it will be hard for us all," said Mrs. Drury, lovingly patting Jack's hand, "but after we are used to it we will not find it so irksome. We must all help ourselves and each other, and as

Katrine is to be the housekeeper we must spare her as much as possible, for she will have the hardest work of all, till I get a little stronger."

Mammy Rose's face, which had been long and wobegone all through supper, brightened up as a sudden thought seemed to come to her, and she stopped behind Charlie's chair, a plate of hot waffles in one hand and a jar of honey in the other, to exclaim :

"Dere, Mis' Lucy, I 'clare to goodness I's jes' foun' a plan. Yo' ole Mammy'll feel mo' easy 'bout yo' now—dat li'l' pick-aninny ob a Topsy mus' come up hyar an' tak' care ob yo'. Now, doan' say *No*, Mis' Lucy," as Mrs. Drury shook her head. "Topsy am a caperable chile an' she knows some t'ings jes' 's well 's ole Mammy. But she ain' nebber bin inter serbice, an' ef yo'll jes' take her, Mis' Lucy, she'll fin' out how to do eberyting jes' like she'd bin in serbice in de fust famblies all her life."

"But," said Mrs. Drury, who remembered the last time she had seen Topsy

that a more mischievous little darky never lived, "I am afraid she would be more care than help; and it would be one more mouth to feed."

"Oh, Mis' Lucy, doan' say *No!*" cried Mammy, putting the dishes down and clasping her hands supplicatingly. "Topsy am t'ree years older now dan w'en yo' laid eyes on her, an' I reck'n she c'n be-yave herself. An' her Mammy'll be right near, an' Mis' Lucy, honey, she kin wash dishes an' she kin scrub an' she's a borned cook. An' Mis' Lucy, ef yo'll let Mammy pay yo' fo' teachin' Topsy how de bes' famblies does——"

"Hush, Mammy," said Mrs. Drury, as the old darky was becoming almost hysterical again. "If Topsy can work as you say, it may be well to have her—what do you think, Katrine? Shall we try her?"

"Oh yes, do!" cried Katrine, jumping up and helping sleepy little Polly from her chair and starting off with her to bed.

And so Mammy got Ben to write for Topsy that very night, enclosing in the letter money for her trip north.

CHAPTER V

TOPSY

“**H**OW do you think that looks, Topsy?” asked Katrine. She was hanging some simple white curtains at the windows in the little sitting-room of their new home. Topsy had been in Cicero for nearly a week, and was already devoted to her new mistress and the family; in fact, she had been devoted to them all her life, because Mammy Rose had been, and anything that Mammy Rose said or did had always been followed in the Pink household.

The week had been a very busy one for the Drurys. First of all a telegram had come from Mr. Hewing saying that his family would like to move into the Rockery in a week, and so there had been much hurrying and scurrying to decide what was wanted and what was not

wanted in the little house, and everything that was not wanted was put carefully away in the big garret at the Rockery. The Hewings were moving into the Rockery that very day, and Middy was glad the children were so busy that they didn't have time to think about leaving their home. Mammy Rose had not left them yet; she was going to get them entirely settled before she withdrew her sheltering wings. Topsy was a paragon of virtue, perhaps because her mother was always on hand with a very wide-open eye for any shortcomings. The little darky was as nimble as a chipmunk and as quick as a weasel, and anything she touched seemed to be done in no time. Mrs. Drury was really much pleased with her, and told Mammy Rose she was very glad the girl had been sent for.

You would have laughed to see Mammy Rose in that little sardine-box of a kitchen! When she was in it there was room for no more sardines—she could scarcely turn around, it was such a tight fit. But Topsy just fitted in to perfec-

tion, and declared she “nebber in her bo’n days seed a kitching dat am jes’ made fo’ dis nigger—de cyarpenter c’dn’t ‘a’ fitted it better ef he’d cut a patteren r’om me.” It *was* a cute little place, certainly, and Katrine and Topsy both beamed with joy every time they went in it. Besides the kitchen and a little hall, there was a sunny dining-room, and a bay-windowed sitting-room, as they chose to call it, because parlor was so formal and uncomfortable. And then there was a little room at the side of the house which opened on a tiny porch with steps leading to a side-path. This little room had immediately been claimed as an office, and the boys were at work on a sign to be hung from the porch, visible from the road.

Up-stairs, Mrs. Drury had the largest and sunniest room, and Cousin Helen Cumberly the little box of a room connecting. Katrine took care of baby Polly and slept with her, while the three boys camped together in the other room. Topsy’s corner was in the garret, partitioned off

from the trunk-room. So you see, they were as snug as a bug in a rug, without room for an extra person.

Poor Mammy Rose felt sadly out of place in that tiny house, and after once trying to get into Topsy's little room and bed, she gave up in despair, and the rest of the time she was there she slept on the sitting-room sofa, without saying anything to anybody about it.

Cousin Helen had arrived the day before, and it was the greatest treat in the world to have her near. She had the most restful kind of a face, and she was gentle and patient, and yet very jolly. Nothing seemed to worry her, nor did she ever fret, though she had certainly had a great deal of trouble in losing her mother and father and a very dear sister all in a year—not to mention nearly all her money. Cousin Helen was never sad, though she could be so sympathetic when sympathy was needed. "You couldn't call her an old maid," Jack had said to Katrine, "because she isn't old at all; and you couldn't call her a girl—exactly

—because she understands just what a fellow feels, and girls never do. No, I don't know what you could call her."

"Call her a spinster," a sweet voice had called, and there was Cousin Helen in the doorway; she had overheard what he said. Jack had blushed a deep scarlet, but Cousin Helen didn't seem to mind in the least; in fact, she told him she felt very much complimented. And baby Polly, who was clinging to Cousin Helen's hand, had immediately taken the name up, and insisted upon calling her "Spinner." And Spinner she was to every one after that. It was appropriate, too, for she was as busy as a spider spinning his web, and she spun happy smiles and sweet words and cheer wherever she went.

But if we wander off in this way Katrine will have the house all settled before we can give her any help. Topsy was so busily engaged in picking pins and tacks out of her mouth in order to answer Katrine's question that Katrine, receiving no reply, stood at a little distance from the

window, and eying the curtain critically, asked again:

“What do you think it looks like, Topsy?”

“Well, Mis’ Kat-trine, I doan’ know as I seed nuffin like hit afore—hit looks like lots o’ t’ings. Ef I t’inks ob cream an’ strawberries, an’ t’inks I sees Mis’ Fanny cuttin’ cake, an’ niggers singin’, w’y hit looks like hit was er festibal dress; an’ ef I closes one eye, so, an’ looks at hit wid de odder, hit seems like hit was Monday mornin’ an’ de soapsuds was all frothy waitin’ fo’ de clo’es; an’ ef I shuts de odder eye an’ opens dis one just er teenty bit, so, an’ open bofe quick, I feels like squealin’, fo’ dere’s a big w’ite cloud wid a beau’ful nangel a-sittin’——”

“But I want to know if they hang right,” said practical Katrine, pulling the folds out.

“Dey looks jes’ simply splendigant, Mis’ Kat-trine,” declared Topsy.

“*Do* try to say Katrine,” said the little mistress.

“No use,” said Topsy sadly. “Hit’s

my tongue, Mis' Kat-tr— Mis' Kat. Mis' Kat doan' soun' bery specterble, an' 'tain't jes' right to call yo' by de same name as a four-legged critter. How'll Mis' Trine do?"

Katrine laughed. "It sounds like 'tureen,' Topsy, but I s'pose it will have to do if you can't say the other. There! That's the very last thing to do in here, and Spinner will be pleased when she sees the room. Now, Topsy, you take Polly out for a walk, and I'm going up-stairs with Middy for a while."

So Topsy tied Polly's blue hood on and buttoned her coat, and, putting a clean white apron on herself, went out. They were a fascinating pair, the little rosy, roly-poly golden-haired baby, and the blackest of black little darkies, with teeth which tried to rival the whiteness of the spick-and-span apron and a wonderful bright turban, for Mammy was old-fashioned in her notions,



and Topsy was brought up to think that a ducky was not respectable who didn't wear a turban.

They talked about wonderful things—Topsy did most of the talking, rather. She told the most wonderful tales of a gingerbread moo-cow all tattered and torn, of her intimate acquaintance, who built a great house, and invited a young man who was very sad and forlorn to come in and kiss a maid with a crumpled horn. Topsy never got much further than this, for she was apt to wander into some story about "ha'nts" that lived near her home, about which she told questionable tales; but as Polly didn't know "ha'nts" from pussy-cats, the stories never excited her very much.

It was in the middle of a fine story about "Heydiddle-diddle, the cow in the middle, the spoon ran away with the cat; the dinner plate grinned to see such pranks; and the dog's in the moon—think ob dat!" that Polly discovered she had dropped Jemima Jane, her most precious rag doll, and when they turned to look



They talked about wonderful things.

for her she was coming toward them in the hands of a beautiful young lady, who was escorted by a handsome young man.

Polly forgot all about Jemima Jane when she saw the young lady; she had a great eye for beauty, Polly had. She clapped her hands, and with one of her most engaging smiles looked up in the young lady's face and said:

“Booful!”

“What? This dolly of yours?” asked the young lady, holding it out to her. But Polly didn't see Jemima Jane; she held out her hands to the young lady.

“Oo,” she answered sweetly. “Polly lubs oo.”

The young man laughed till Topsy was afraid he would lose his balance and fall over, and Polly looked up at him with an injured air as the young lady stooped to the ground.



“Isn’t oo lub her?” demanded Polly in a hurt voice; but the young lady had snatched Polly up and almost smothered her with kisses, so that the young man didn’t have a chance to reply.

“You darling—I’d give five dollars to own you for an hour!” exclaimed the young lady, with a very pretty sunset color in her face. “What is your name, sweetheart?”

The young man looked as if he felt left out in the cold, but he didn’t say anything, for Topsy’s next words diverted his attention.

Topsy had been in the house some little time when she was called upon to help Mammy with the last of the settling, and time wore on until it was half-past five. For some reason she was quite uneasy, and she kept one eye fixed on the front window all the time. Presently Katrine came down-stairs calling the baby, but Polly was nowhere to be found; and in a few minutes the whole family was searching high and low for her.

"When did you bring her in, Topsy?" asked Mrs. Drury.

"I ain' seed her sence I come in," said Topsy airily, and then in a minute she burst into tears.

"O—Mis'—Lucy—I—I done—I done—rented—Polly!"

"Rented!" exclaimed the family aghast.

"Yes, Mis' Lucy," sobbed Topsy. "I done rented her fo' an hour, 'cause Polly she cried to go an' de young lady say she pay fibe dollars fo' an hour—O Mis' Lucy—I—I——"

"Why, Topsy!" cried Mrs. Drury, "how *could* you do such a thing!"

"Dey'll bring her back at fibe," sobbed Topsy. "I—I—done wanted to make some money fo' Jack an' Comp'ny—Dere!" she cried, her tears stopping as if by magic, as she caught sight of a young man carrying a sleepy little bundle with soft arms clasped around his neck. "Dere she am, Mis' Lucy. I done tole yo' dey was hones'."

Polly was deposited with many thanks

and a little envelope clasped tightly in her hand, in which was a five-dollar gold piece; and Topsy was whisked off to the attic room—the last time Mammy tried to get in there—and was severely reasoned with.

CHAPTER VI

BARGAINS AND WORK

BEN started to go to school a few days after they moved, and Charlie went with him, enjoying immensely the dignity which such a proceeding lent him. But going to school did not cure him of his fondness for noise, and it required the strict attention of the whole family to keep him from making them all deaf at the times he spent in the house. He developed a most wonderful fondness for "swapping" almost everything he possessed, even to his clothes, and although he stoutly declared he was always satisfied with his changes, the rest of the family were very doubtful about his success. One day, for instance, Katrine put his tie on, buttoned his jacket, and sent him skipping to school. He came back with a gaudy yellow necktie in place of

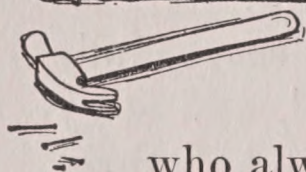
his pretty blue one, and an ulster where his pea-jacket should have been. The difference was discovered by Cousin Helen, who made him promise to change back the next day, and fortunately the other small boy's mother exacted a similar promise from him very readily, as his legs were cold in a pea-jacket.

But his next bargain was hardly as fortunate, for it refused to be "swapped back," and promptly told Charlie what it thought of him. In some way he became convinced that a small brother would be an improvement on Polly, and so he promptly traded her off for a very lively small boy, not much younger than himself. Of course the family objected when they found it out, but the small boy, who was enjoying himself immensely breaking Charlie's toys, insisted that a bargain was a bargain, and he liked it very much better than at home, where there were no toys to break, because they were already broken. Just as the argument reached a very heated point, when the small boy had hurled a whole train of cars at Char-

lie (fortunately missing his mark), and Charlie was considering the advisability of charging his army of tin soldiers at the intruder, the traded Polly appeared, in high feather at having been out by herself again to spend the afternoon, and her escort made forcible claims upon the small boy. Charlie failed to see where he had been at fault until a game of go-to-bed-without-supper was proposed, when he became exceedingly penitent.

Thanksgiving was passed successfully by a very cheery, thankful, and cozy family in the "Nest," as they had christened their new home. The treasurer was hoarding quite a sum of money in her bank, and the books, which were neatly kept by the secretary, showed that the people appreciated the new Company, and made frequent use of it. Mrs. Drury was slowly gaining her strength, and appeared every day now in her old place with the family. Jack and Ben had plenty of work with their tools, and Katrine was called upon very often. The boys were building a wood-house for Mr.

Cole, at the other end of the town, and there was an order for a large doll house for Christmas, which was to be sent to



two little girls who lived many miles away. It was to be furnished complete, and Katrine had two dolls to dress to occupy it. This order came from Mr. Manning,

who always tried to find something for the boys to do. But, to tell the truth, he hadn't an idea to whom to send it until Dr. McKinney helped him ferret out a couple of small distant cousins, who had never even dreamed of possessing a doll house, not to mention two such beautiful dolls. This was quite a task for the boys, for every little piece of wood had to be placed just so, and Jack would have nothing but the very best of workmanship, so that if he or Ben made the slightest mistake the

work had to be done over until it was perfect.

The "office" was too tiny a place to work in, so the boys had rigged up a triple-action bell at the office door. One rang in the office, one in the hall, and one in the shed where they were apt to work. This arrangement made it easy to keep track of any one who called, without remaining in the office.

Every Saturday Katrine was engaged to go next door to Dr. McKinney's and bake. The doctor was very fond of good things to eat, and his old house servant had lost her knack of making dainties, so that Katrine was called upon every week to do these things for her friend. She was a natural-born cook and nothing ever "went back on her," although at times she was driven almost frantic by the doctor himself, who, if he happened to be in the house when she was baking, was in the kitchen, putting his nose first into this and then into that, smacking his lips delightedly, and insisting upon "licking the pans" just as if he were a small boy.

“What is this?” he would ask, taking the cork out of the molasses jug and squinting into its neck. “Oh, my! I really believe it is cider!” and he would hold the jug up and prepare to take a drink from its mouth, while Hester would shriek from the pantry where she was scrubbing, and Katrine, holding her floury hands up in horror, would dash to rescue the molasses. And after he had put the jug down with a most injured and innocent expression on his face, he would whistle some lively air until Katrine had her hands back in the bread again or was busy stirring the cake; then he would grab one handful of raisins and the other of citron and caper about the kitchen, Katrine chasing him around the table and scolding, while Hester would come out and call reprovingly:

“O Master Sibbey, who would ‘a’ thought it were thirty year ago your father used to keep a loose shingle over the kitchen door to keep you in order!”

“No such thing, Hester,” the doctor would laugh. “Go back to your scrub-

bing. If it hadn't been for you being jealous of all the girls, I would have been married for years."

"I don't wonder you aren't!" Katrine would exclaim, half out of patience. "I reckon you'd drive your wife *crazy* if you had one, Dr. McKinney."

Then the doctor would laugh until the house fairly shook, and Mrs. Drury's sweet face was quite sure to look out of the window and across the yards to see what all the noise was about; and as likely as not Cousin Helen would peer over her shoulder. Then the doctor would behave better, for Katrine knew he stood quite in awe of the sweet and gentle mother. If their faces appeared in the sitting-room window the doctor was apt to slide out of the back door (which Katrine would bolt securely after him), a lump of brown sugar in one hand, a stick of cinnamon in the other, cross the yards and offer a bite to Mrs. Drury and "Miss Spinner," and then spend a half-hour in telling them what a fine cook Katrine was and how proud they should be of her.

Fortunately for Katrine's work, the doctor was usually off making his calls, and then there was quiet in the kitchen and she could collect her wits. Once when the doctor was bothering her she put salt in the bread twice, and at another time she forgot the baking-powder in the cake, but the doctor declared he had always liked salt, and Hester would never give him enough for fear his bones would turn into chalk and she would have no one to keep house for; and he thought baking-powder was unhealthy anyway. Katrine made a dollar each Saturday morning she spent in this way, and gained a great deal of experience.

At Thanksgiving the doctor, who seemed to be growing young instead of old, decided to have a dinner-party; and since he didn't have any family of his own he invited the Drurys—and of course the minister—and strangest of all, hired Katrine to help Hester plan the dinner and make the pies and superintend everything. Cousin Helen laughed heartily

over the idea of being paid for going out to dinner, but the doctor didn't mind it a bit. He confided to Mr. Manning, however, that it was solely on his account that he had asked the boys.

"You keep them out of the way, will you?" he had said, "and I'll keep Katrine and Polly quiet."

But as to keeping them quiet—he was the noisiest one of the whole party!

Katrine was very tired after that effort, but it paid her when she pushed the clean, crisp two-dollar bill into her money-box and received the grateful thanks of the doctor. But better than all was her mother's loving kiss and "My daughter is a brave little woman."

CHAPTER VII

THE MARCH HARES

MAMMY ROSE was not quite so heart-broken at leaving her mistress as she might have been if the kitchen had been a few feet larger, or if she had been going far away. Two weeks after she had left them she came to see them one day. It was the very first they had heard of her since then, for she declared she would not come to see them until she had procured a "settled place," as she called it. Polly saw her first, and with a rapturous cry of delight threw her arms about her neck and kissed her black face over and over, calling her "Pow'y's sweet rosebud," and other endearing names.

"Laws, honey," exclaimed Mammy to Mrs. Drury, "I done t'ink yo' nebber lib widout Mammy, nor Mammy widout

yo'; but you's all looking jes' splendid. Am Topsy beyaved herself? Chil'en will be chil'en at times, honey. Dey's chil'en widout en' where Mammy are now."

"But you haven't told us where you have been," said Mrs. Drury.

"I done said nuttin' ter nobuddy 'cept ter Topsy, 'cause ef I doan' like de place den I wanter leabe, but Mammy's gwine stay now fer sho'. Mis' Waldron she——"

"Waldron!" exclaimed Jack, who had just come in from his work at the shop. "Are they the people who live over near Starmouth, where I went that day to polish the table?"

"Yo' take de words out'n Mammy's mouf," said she reprovingly. "Dey has on'y two chil'ens what belongs to 'em," she added, "but dey has mo' br'er rabbits dan yo' can shake a stick at."

"*What?*" asked Cousin Helen.

"Rabbits," repeated Mammy. "Some kind o' rabbits dey calls 'em, an' dey turn de house upside down a-chasin' and a-yelin' an' a-whoopin'——"

“The March Hares!” cried Jack. “Don’t you remember I told you about ’em, Middy? It’s the same Waldrons, and the ‘March Hares’ were probably Indians at the time Mammy describes them,” he added, laughing. “Did they know where you came from, Mammy? Did they remember me?”

Mammy always preferred to tell her own stories in her own way, but the children knew that to wait for her to get to a point would be to wait a long time, so they seldom gave her a chance to finish, or hardly to commence a tale. Mammy saw she could not tell it as she wished, so she put one of her hands into her capacious pocket and pulled forth an envelope addressed to Jack of “Jack & Company,” and handed it solemnly to its owner.

Jack smiled delightedly; it is so pleasant to know that people remember you, especially when you have very pleasant recollections of them. He tore the envelope open and then laughed.

“Isn’t that just like them?” he said,

putting the letter into his mother's hand, while the others crowded around to see.

"Will Jack and his Company come to help us find a new way of being mad next Saturday?" they read, and it was signed "The March Hares; by Sally and Paul."

There were various exclamations of delight at this, and Charlie beamed with joy, for wasn't he a member of the "Company"?

"It'll be just bully fun!" he cried.

"What, my son?" asked his mother.

"Well, I mean just lots of fun," declared Charlie.

"Benny says bully—why can't I, Mid-dy?"

"You can't go," said Jack. "They're all much older than you."



Charlie burst into loud wails which were promptly quieted by Mammy's next words.

"Yes, he kin," she said. "Dey sent

fer 'em *all*, Mis' Lucy; an' de carryall 'll be down at 'leben, Saturday."

"Are we to stay to *lunch*?" cried Katrine. "Oh, what fun!"

"But somebody has to stay at home," suggested Ben. "Who 's going to 'tend to orders if we're all away?"

"*You* can stay at home," suggested Katrine.

But that was a horse of a different color, and Ben thought that they might leave the office unattended for one day.

It was finally settled, however, by Topsy being left in charge. Katrine performed her duties at the doctor's and was ready to start when the Waldrons' big family carriage stopped for them the next day. They had a jolly ride, with Sally Waldron to entertain them, and she and Katrine became fast friends before they reached the house.

"*Do* tell us the names of the March Hares," begged Katrine. "Jack told us all about you and about them, and we were so interested."

"We're not a bit interesting, though

we do have fun," said Sally, showing a row of very white teeth in her jolly laugh. She was a little mite of a girl for thirteen, and as different from Katrine as sawdust is from salt. Her hair was the darkest of shiny browns, hanging about her shoulders in wild-looking curls; her blue eyes were bright and snappy, and her nose saucy; while Katrine's light hair was always neatly tied in two big braids, and her long eyelashes blinked over a pair of big gray eyes, and, although her nose was as straight and prim as could have been desired, her mouth destroyed the resemblance to a staid Quaker maiden, because it would laugh most of the time. Jack had the curls of the family—those that Polly didn't have, rather—which Katrine was apt to declare was hardly fair play.

"There are eight of us—six besides Paul and me," explained Sally, "and we're all of us very stupid, so that we've done everything we can think of, and have to ask you to help us out. It would never do for us to be twice alike, you know. And since you are Jacks-of-all-trades we

knew you could give us lots of suggestions."

Katrine laughed and shook her head. "Don't be too sure," she said. "It seems to me that is the hardest task we've had yet, isn't it, Jack?"

"Why, *that's* easy enough," replied Jack confidently. "If I never have anything harder than that to do I won't have much work."

"What is it?" cried Charlie excitedly. It was so long a time since he had been out to spend the day that he was overflowing with spirits.

"Wait and see," said his brother. "There's the house, Katrine—see, in there among the trees. And there's the orchard where you Hares were playing as I left that day," he added to Sally.

"Yes, the orchard and the barn are our favorite places," said Sally. "That is, all except Prue Dean—she would rather stay in the parlor all day long, I do believe. She's always so afraid she'll rumple her dress, or get her hair out of curl, or something."

"I don't believe I'll like her," cried Jack. "Who are the others?"

"Oh, yes indeed you will—Prue's lots of fun. She has learned yards and yards of poetry, and will say it whenever you want her to; and she acts beautifully. You just ought to see and hear her in Shakespeare! She likes that better than anything else. Well, there are Prue's twin brothers, Bob and Frank. Prue isn't Prue's real name. Her name is Miriam, but Bob nicknamed her Prue ever so long ago, and it just fits her. Then there are the two Webers—Florence and Beth—and Dick Lyon. Dick is our funny boy."

Sally's description of the March Hares was very good, as the children found later, when they made their acquaintance. It wasn't a bit like going into a strange house, for Jack's visit had made it familiar to the others; and there was Mamma waiting to welcome them just as if they had been away for a while and were returning to their own home. Mr. and Mrs. Waldron had gone away that morn-

ing to spend Sunday, and noise and fun were the order of the day. They generally were when the March Hares were about, but when Mrs. Waldron was at home the Hares attempted to be quiet—once in a while when in the house.

Mammy had prepared just the sort of a lunch one aches for on a brisk November day, and hot waffles and chocolate fairly flew, which pleased her very much—as it always pleases a cook to have her handiwork appreciated.

After luncheon Jack was called upon to unfold his scheme for their afternoon's amusement. To tell the truth he hadn't the remotest idea what to suggest, but he was a boy who would never acknowledge defeat until sure he was defeated, and he hoped a brilliant idea would strike him. But unfortunately it didn't, and the reputation of Jack and Company was only saved by a chance remark of Charlie's.

"Hurry up, Jack, *do* tell us," cried Charlie, jumping up and down in his excitement. "He said you must have been Indians the other day," said he to Paul,

“’cause Mammy said you were making so much noise.”

Everybody laughed at this, but the idea of Indians seemed to take, and before Jack had a chance to become anxious about their reputation, the March Hares were wildly enthusiastic on the Indian subject. Before many minutes had passed half of the party was transformed into Indians and half into settlers, and there were wild scrimmages between the red men and the white. The Indians seemed to be in a fair way to exterminate the settlers, when a little accident occurred that drove all thoughts of fighting and capturing from their minds.

CHAPTER VIII

AN ACCIDENT

THE settlers were steadily diminishing under the persistent attacks of the redskins. There were six of each in the beginning; four of the white men had been captured, and were waiting for a chance to escape before they felt the deadly tomahawk. Cotton Mather and his wife were the ones who had so far escaped. These personages were known in every-day life as Charlie Drury and Sally Waldron. They were in hiding in the woods—otherwise the spacious barn and stable—when the terrible war-whoops of the Indians, very near at hand, fell upon their ears.

“They’ll find us here, Cotton,” said Mrs. Mather, hurriedly crawling from underneath the feed-box in one of the stalls, and helping her small spouse from under

another feed-box by vigorous pulling. "Where shall we fly?"

"To the hay-loft!" cried Cotton excitedly, making all haste out of the stalls.

But the Indians were upon them before they could reach the ladder that led to the hay-loft, where they would have been safely hidden, covered with hay; and Mrs. Mather hurriedly pulled her husband into a small harness closet near by, where they huddled in the darkness.

"Is the door locked?" inquired Cotton Mather. "Won't they look in here?"

"Goodness — I forgot!" exclaimed Mrs. Mather, jumping forward in excitement. "Thomas always leaves the key on the shelf here — I can't feel it, though. Where *does* he keep his matches?"



"I feel a tin box," said Charlie. "Won't they hear us strike a match?"

"Oh, no—yes, there are matches in that box. Now I'll strike one, and you look for the key, Charlie."

The match was struck and Charlie reached up to the shelf, seeing the key behind a number of bottles. As Sally struck another match he reached excitedly for the key, for the Indians were very near, and the game was as real to him as if he were actually to lose his scalp if captured. A minute later there was a scream from Sally and a blaze in the harness closet.

The scream betrayed the whereabouts of the whites still at large, and in a second the closet door was thrown open by them. A blaze of light, with Sally's frightened face in the center, startled the Indians, and made them fall back a step.

After hesitating a minute Jack grasped the situation, and springing forward, seized Sally with one hand and Charlie with the other.

"Run for the men!" he said shortly

to those behind him, as he threw Sally on the floor and grabbed the coats that Bob and Frank had hurriedly taken off and handed him. He and Paul wrapped these quickly about Sally, rolling her on the floor and pressing out the flames that were blazing from her clothes; Prue and Ben were doing the same for Charlie, whose coat had taken fire; Katrine and Dick Lyon were off like a flash to give the alarm and summon help, while Florence and Beth were dragging horse blankets for the relief of Sally and Charlie.

When help arrived a few minutes later the fire had grown into a lively blaze, and the children were carrying the limp little body of Sally toward the house. She had fainted—they knew that—but how badly she was burned they couldn't tell. Charlie was not injured, but he was very much frightened, and had to be carried to the house, too, for he caught a glimpse of Sally, and shutting his eyes, refused to open them again.

Sally revived under Mammy's careful and experienced hands, and after two or

three little gasps of returning consciousness, asked whether Cotton Mather were captured. Then she seemed to remember, and putting her hand up to her singed curls, she inquired if they were burned. Mammy closed the doors to all but Katrina; and the others, finding that Sally was not very seriously hurt, ran excitedly back to the barn. The two men had been able to make no headway against the flames. They spread quickly from the harness closet to the rest of the barn; and a long fiery tongue, eluding every one's watchful eyes and hands, licked its way to the hay-loft, and in a minute the whole loft was ablaze. Nothing less than two or three supplies from a city fire department could save the building now, and the attention of every one was turned toward saving the other buildings and the live stock from them. The coachman was away with one team, which left only five horses in the burning building. By the time the flames had spread to the hay-loft an assemblage of neighbors and passers-by had gathered, and, in addition

to the two lines of hose, a bucket brigade was formed from the well to the buildings. The brigade was formed by Jack, who, with two or three of the neighbors and the other children, passed buckets of water with great rapidity. Suddenly a loud neighing cry came from the stable.

Paul, who was standing next to Jack, looked very frightened for a moment.

"It's Jewel—he has been forgotten!" he gasped.

"Where is he?" asked Jack.

"In the very end stall," said Paul, "and the flames are getting near him. What can we do, Jack? Sally loves him better than anything she owns, and her heart will break if——"

Jack hesitated a moment. "You move up a little, Paul, so's to keep the buckets going. I think I can save the pony," and he darted off to the end of the burning building. There was a small door leading into the feed-room, and from there he knew another door opened into the stall where Jewel was. It was the work of only a moment to get into the

feed-room, which was beginning to fill with smoke, to dart across to the other door and grasp the knob.

The door was locked on the other side!

Jack grew sick with horror as he realized that the beautiful, affectionate little pony, whose frightened cries appealed so strongly to him for help, was doomed to burn to death; and he gulped down a great sob as he stood hesitating for an instant. Then, with a cheerful call to the pony, who answered with a grateful whinny, he turned and fairly flew across the feed-room and into the fresh air again; he remembered having seen an ax somewhere. It was near at hand, for one of the men had been splitting wood just outside the door.

Seizing the ax, he dashed back again into the room, and with a few well-aimed blows the door fell in with a crash. The rush of smoke blinded him and made him gasp for a minute. Though the smoke was thick it did not conceal the fact that flames had broken through the other end



WALTER RUSSELL

"Run, Jack, run!" cried Paul.

of the stall. Jewel was neighing piteously and tugging at her halter, too strong to be broken by pulling.

Jack had read that horses are terrified by fire, and utterly without reason when flames are in sight. Poor Jewel was so close to the flames that her beautiful silky tail was singeing. With a quick movement the boy shook off his jacket, and flinging it about Jewel's head, tied the arms close over her eyes so that she could see nothing. Then he whipped out his knife and slashed at the halter.

The smoke was suffocating, and the flames burst uproariously all over the stall; a sickening fear came upon Jack, and he felt incapable of moving. He made one last effort to start Jewel in the direction of the door, when he heard Paul's voice close to his ear, and felt a hand on his arm.

"Run, Jack, run!" cried Paul, pulling him bodily into the feed-room and across the floor. Jack, almost stupefied by the smoke, ran blindly, with the halter still

clasped firmly in his hand, and Jewel stumbling after him.

As the three emerged from the building a great shout arose from the workers outside, and the front of the barn fell with a crash, while the feed-room burst into flames.

Gentle and willing hands relieved the suffering pony and almost exhausted boy, and hurried them to a place of safety.

Sally, who by this time had been carefully treated by Mammy, was sitting at the window with bandaged head and hands. Her burns were very painful, but Mammy's soothing applications were having a quieting effect, and she was watching the flames as they steadily burst from beam after beam, consuming everything that came in their way.

Since he had been brought to the house and had thrown himself face down on the sofa cushions, Charlie had not moved, although Katrine had soothed him and told him over and over that nothing so dreadful had happened—that Sally was in the next room and only hurt a

little. As the front of the barn fell, Katrine ran out on the porch, leaving Charlie alone, and a wobegone little face was lifted from the cushions to glance about the room.

"Oh—oh—*oh*!" came a cry from the next room, which so startled the already frightened child that he jumped from the couch in terror.

"Come quick!" called Sally, and he ran in just in time to see Jack staggering around the end of the barn, Paul pulling at one arm, and the frightened pony stumbling after. Sally fairly cried for joy on seeing the rescue of her beloved Jewel, about whom she had not thought till that moment. And poor little Charlie was completely bewildered by the flames on one hand, and by the sight of Sally sitting calmly by the window and not limp and helpless as he had seen her carried from the barn.

"Isn't Jack the bravest, most splendid boy!" cried Sally. "Don't look so frightened, Charlie—I'm all right except a burn or two. Give me a kiss and see

if I'm not; and now run out and see if either Jack or Jewel is hurt."

Charlie gave her a very doubting kiss, but finding she was real flesh and blood and not a ghost, his spirits revived in a moment; and Katrine was astonished a minute later to see him tearing across the porch and toward the group about Jack.

Fifteen minutes more and the barn was a smoldering ruin; the fire was entirely out, the danger over, and a solemn group was gathered at the house to sum up the injuries. Jack's hands were somewhat burned, and he had inhaled a large amount of smoke, but otherwise he seemed to be all right, so that the list of injured included only Sally, Jewel, Jack, and one of the men, whose foot had been struck by a falling beam. Mr. and Mrs. Waldron were not expected home until Monday, and Sally persuaded Paul to say he would prepare them for the sight of a singed daughter.

It was a sad little party that was driven home later to tell Middy about

the afternoon. Dr. McKinney dressed Jack's wounds, frowning crossly all the time at "the carelessness of those rascally boys!" His face relaxed a little when told how the accident occurred. Cousin Helen laughed at him unmercifully for being so hard on the boys; but that the doctor really did like girls better than boys was proved by the fact that he drove out to the Waldrons' house that evening to see that Sally's wounds had proper treatment, although he was well acquainted with Mammy's proficiency in nursing.

CHAPTER IX

“KETCH A NIGGER”

TOPSY felt very much hurt that she had not been with the others at the time of the fire. She knew “dere was lots of t’ings I’d ’a’ done jes’ as brave as Marse Jack” and she’d “like nuffin better ’n to yank a dozen hosses from a burnin’ barn—jes’ as easy as rollin’ off a log.” But as she didn’t have her own exploits to talk about, she did full justice to Jack’s—when he wasn’t near. She professed a great contempt for boys and their doings, but she was in reality very proud of her young masters. She never told them so, but the tales she told others showed what a loyal heart she kept somewhere in her little black body. She was a willing slave to Katrine, ready to fly at any moment to obey her least wish; and as for Mrs. Drury, Topsy always approached

her on tiptoe, with a most respectful little salaam, her eyes fixed upon her mistress's eyes, and never moving a muscle of her face. Her behavior with Cousin Helen was not quite so deferential, probably owing to the fact that Mammy had not spent her life in Cousin Helen's employ. Topsy always called Mrs. Drury “My Queen” in her thoughts and in talking to Polly.

Polly and Topsy were famous companions, and there was no subject upon which Topsy conversed that was too deep for the baby. She listened with deep interest to everything Topsy had to say, and a choice collection of tales she heard.

The Wednesday after the fire was a day full of events for the usually well-behaved Topsy, who started the day by breaking an old blue pitcher that had belonged to Mrs. Drury's grandmother and was much prized by the family. She was very much frightened when she saw what had happened, for she had strict instructions from “my queen” never to touch the pitcher. But she was so very

penitent that she was forgiven upon her promise never to disobey again.

Just before noon Miss Prim, who lived to the left of the "Nest," called and asked



to see Mrs. Drury ; and nothing but seeing Mrs. Drury would satisfy her. So she was ushered up-stairs to the sitting-room, where Middy was in her "blue funk," as Ben called one of his mother's wrappers — one that he hated — and there she solemn-

ly unfolded the reason of her call. It seems that Miss Prim's house was enclosed in a picket fence that ended in two large posts at the front gate. These posts were square, with smooth sides, and Miss Prim had lately been annoyed by finding that some, one who possessed more sense of humor than artistic talent, had been decorating her posts. Now Miss Prim was possessed of neither artistic qualities

nor appreciation of the ridiculous, and she always talked in feet. By feet I mean poetical feet; she spoke in syllables, dividing her sentences into iambic feet, as it would be called in verse; like this: “And *I will go to town.*”

Katrine opened the door, and accidentally called her “Miss Iambus,” which was the very disrespectful way the children had of alluding to her. Of course, Middy didn’t approve of it, but argue and persuade as she would, she couldn’t make them see that Miss Prim should be treated with as much respect as, for instance, other children should treat Cousin Helen. They were both “old maids,” though Miss Iambus was probably forty-five, while Cousin Helen was only thirty-three. Katrine said that if Spinner looked as sour and cross as Miss Prim did, she would be willing to call her by any old name, too. Even if people had had lots of sorrow and trouble, it was no excuse for such a face and manner as Miss Prim had. Look at Middy, for instance—and there the lecture would end.

Topsy was convulsed with laughter as she ushered Miss Prim up-stairs, and to save her reputation in the sight of "my queen," she bolted from the room as soon as Miss Prim had entered.

But Miss Prim's important errand, it seemed, was connected with Topsy her-

self; for she had been caught in the very act of drawing what she considered a striking likeness of Miss Iambus on that lady's own post. Topsy was summoned and examined by her mistress and the visitor. She had not



quite recovered from her fit of laughter over Katrine's blunder, but one glance at Mrs. Drury's face served to sober her.

"This is the *one* I saw," said Miss Prim stiffly. "Are you the *girl* who drew upon my gate?"

"Dunno," said Topsy sorrowfully, "wedder yo' seed me or not."

“Topsy!” said her mistress.

“Yes’m,” said Topsy meekly, “I—I done it, Mis’.”

“You must tell Miss Prim you are sorry and will never do so again,” said Mrs. Drury.

Topsy hesitated a moment, trying to find words to suit her. This was the first time her mistress had had to reprove her in the presence of strangers.

“I’s sorry I’s done put yo’ to any exco-
venience, Mis’ Prim,” she said finally, “an’
Mis’ Lucy she says I’s sorry, an’ I’s sorry
she’s sorry, an’ ef yo’ll fergive me I’ll go
scrub it off’n the gate.”

Miss Prim seemed a little mollified at this apology, although Cousin Helen, who had entered the room as Miss Prim came, had to leave her chair suddenly and look out of the window.

“I’m *glad* that *you* can see the evil
of your *ways*,” said Miss Prim stiffly to
Topsy. “Is *this* your *first offense*?”

“’Twarn’t yo’ fence, ’twas yo’ gate-
post,” said Topsy stolidly, while the tears
came into Cousin Helen’s eyes, and she

had to leave the room in a fit of coughing.

“That will do, Topsy; you may go,” said Mrs. Drury quickly, her mouth twitching with a desire to laugh, while Miss Prim drew herself up haughtily; and Topsy, taking advantage of her chance, backed respectfully out of the room, and flew down-stairs to tell Katrine how stupid Miss Prim was. Mrs. Drury was left to pour oil on the troubled waters—a thing which she always did to perfection, as the boys could tell from many experiences.

Although Topsy never liked to let any one see that she had “feelings,” she had them all the same, and that day there was a very sore spot in the warm heart hidden in the little black body. Twice in one day she has deserved blame at the hands of “my queen.” If Miss Lucy had only stormed forth like Mammy Rose did, or if she had called her into the room and settled the matter with the help of the back of a hair-brush or a cherry switch, as Mammy Rose was also wont to

do, Topsy would have put on a stony front and have forgotten the occurrence as soon as the encounter was over. But that same little hidden heart began to act in a very queer manner when “my queen” spoke in gentle and forgiving reproof, and the punishment stung much more than either the hair-brush or the cherry switch.

Consequently that afternoon Polly’s nurse and companion was not the full-of-fun Topsy, but a grave and introspective little darky, thinking deeply of her sins.

Perhaps you have never noticed it, but when a person thinks so very deeply of the sins he has committed, he is very apt not to look out for new sins into which he may stray. Still, if you happen to be a little black girl who is too proud to confide in any one but a prattling baby, perhaps you may have had the same experience.

Topsy, and Polly in her close-fitting little white cap and fluffy blue coat, wandered out into the country that afternoon, Polly doing most of the talking. There

were so many wonderful things on the road that attracted one's attention—the most fascinating balls of dirt that crumbled in your hands and made a fine brown shower all down your pretty blue coat; and curly sticks that reminded you of all sorts of things, from the jolly doctorman down to peppermint candy; and a squirrel that now and then appeared on a stone wall and sat for a moment, tail in air, munching a stray nut, and looking with inquisitive bright little eyes at the intruders.

“Ef she'd on'y jes' looked drefful cross an' boxed bofe ears,” said Topsy mournfully as the squirrel disappeared for the second time, “it'd be all right; but she jes' sot dere an'—an' looked sweet—an' it *hurts*,” she ended.

“Middy'll tiss an' make it *all* well,” suggested Polly. “Oh—oh—a choo-choo! Pow'y wants to see a choo-choo! Tum!”

They were right near the railroad and a train was coming—you could hear the engine whistle in the distance.

“Sho’ ’nuff,” said Topsy quickly, glad of some amusement. “Here we is, Polly,” and she lifted the baby to the bank beside the track. “But dat ain’t what de inj’n says, Polly, no more nor a pussy cat does. De inj’n ain’t goin’ to hurt a white baby like yo’, but it jes’ talks to dis yere wicked black pusson—doan’ yer eber be a wicked nigger, Polly—fer here it comes. Listen, now; hear it talkin’—*ketch a nigger, chuck him under—ketch a nigger, chuck him under—ketch a nigger, chuck him under—ketch a nigger, chuck him under—ketch a nigger, chuck him under—ketch a nigger, chuck him under!*”

Topsy leaned forward and pulled an imaginary “nigger” toward herself, keeping time to her words as the engine approached; and the performance of the weird little figure, and the rush of the engine which she had wanted to see, so frightened the golden-haired baby that she turned and ran blindly, stumbling at the first step. And before Topsy had finished her strange performance, the little ball of

fluffy blue coat, chubby legs, pink cheeks, and golden curls was rolling swiftly down the bank, and with a splash, bounced into the brook at the bottom.



CHAPTER X

A DISAPPEARANCE

“**O**PEN the door!” called a young man as he rushed up the steps of a handsome frame house a few minutes’ walk from the railroad. “Get some water at once!” The sweet-faced young woman who was waiting on the porch to welcome him thought at first that he and his senses had parted; but she caught sight of a stray golden curl peeping from the bundle in his arms, which told her something had happened. Holding the door open for him to pass into the house, she ran for water and brought it just as the young man unwrapped his coat from the limp and dripping form of Polly Drury.

“Why,” they exclaimed together, as they recognized the little face, “it’s our borrowed baby!”

In a minute, after bathing the white

face with cold water and rubbing the little hands and arms vigorously, the blue eyes opened wonderingly, and then, with a frightened little cry, the chubby hands were flung about the young lady's neck. When the wet clothes had been removed Polly closed her eyes contentedly for a nap, wrapped in a soft, warm blanket.

"Now," said the young woman, shaking hands with her visitor at this late time, and telling him she was glad to see him, "tell me where you found her."

"Just before the train pulled into the station," he explained, "I folded my paper and looked out of the window, and as I did so I saw two figures on the bank where the brook twists so prettily—you remember? And as I looked, the baby turned, stumbled, and rolled out of sight toward the brook."

The young woman shuddered.

"The other was a wild-looking little darky, waving her hands and swaying her body to and fro. Well, I jumped from the train before it had stopped, and ran back, to find the little darky

almost white with fright, carrying the child toward the road. I grabbed the baby and ran here, telling the girl to follow as quickly as possible. I wonder where she is—perhaps she has gone to the kitchen.”

The young woman rang a bell and asked the white-capped maid who appeared in answer to the summons, if a darky had arrived; but Topsy had not been seen.

“She must have run home to tell the family—I think I had better go up to the village and tell them myself, don’t you, Miss Madge?”

“By all means,” she answered. “She belongs to ‘Jack and Company,’ of whom I’ve heard so much. Don’t frighten Mrs. Drury, because I believe she’s an invalid. Tell them the darling is sleeping peacefully. It would be just as well to see if the doctor can come over, too.”

So Mr. Kendrick Munn put on his hat again and went striding down the road, thinking how pretty Miss Madge looked as she bent over the sleeping child on the

sofa. He had come from the city to spend the night with Miss Madge and her mother, and he was glad to see Polly again, though not in this way; for that had been a very happy afternoon when they had borrowed Polly for a few hours.

Charlie was the only one of the Company at home, as there had been a rush of orders that afternoon.

"Katrine's over at Green's making salted almonds and things for a party tomorrow," he volunteered, "and Jack is painting the Dodds' chicken house. Benny's writing for the minister. Is there anything I can do for you?" he inquired in his most business-like manner. "Do you want a letter posted—or—or do you want a suspender button sewed on—I can run fine errands!"

"No," laughed Mr. Munn, "my suspenders are all right, thank you, and I have no letters to post. Where is your colored girl?"

"Topsy's gone walking with Polly," said Charlie in a disappointed tone.

"Didn't she come back?"

"No," said Charlie, afraid he might lose a possible customer. "Don't you want something done? I can leave, because Cousin Helen's in and she'll answer the bell."

"Ah!" said the young man. "It is Cousin Helen I came to see. Run and tell her."

In a moment Cousin Helen appeared, and it took but a minute for her to understand what had happened, and to get her hat.

"Tell Middy I've gone for a walk, Charlie, and don't leave the house, for she may want you.—Dr. McKinney is always out at this time of the day, but perhaps we shall meet him on the road," she added to Mr. Munn.

Little Polly was restless and feverish when the doctor reached the house later, and he shook his head and forbade her being moved. So an old-time crib was brought from the garret to the sitting-room, and Polly was laid carefully in it.

"Now," said the doctor, in his decided

way, "Miss Helen, you go home and get ready to nurse the child. Miss Madge hasn't had much experience, but she'll make a good subordinate."

Cousin Helen looked astonished.

"Don't mind about being a stranger," added the doctor, noticing her look, "because I've known Miss Madge and her mother for years, and there are few people like them—eh, Munn?"

So Cousin Helen broke the news gently to Middy, sent for Katrine to come home, and gathering up the few things she needed, went back to Polly's bedside.

And all this time not a sign was there of Topsy. She was not at home, nor had she followed Mr. Munn and Polly to the Winters' house, nor had any one seen her; and as Mr. Munn declared that she was almost as white as chalk, they concluded she was hiding somewhere in fright and would come back at supper-time, if *they* knew her.

But Katrine prepared the supper alone, and it was eaten in silence by the four children down-stairs, for Middy did not

feel able to leave her room. The night passed and no Topsy appeared, nor was she on hand for breakfast. Then the Drurys commenced to worry about her, for Topsy had not been known to miss a meal since she had come North. They thought she might have gone to Mammy Rose, and Dr. McKinney offered to drive out to the Waldrons' and see. Polly had been restless and feverish all night, talking in a rambling way and screaming every now and then; but to-day she lay in a sort of stupor, not recognizing any one, and Miss Madge and Cousin Helen took turns in watching her.

Mammy Rose had not seen her erring daughter, and it was with great difficulty that she was prevented from leaving her kitchen and going back to nurse little Polly. Mr. Waldron instituted searching parties for the missing darky, and the neighborhood for miles was scoured—in vain. No one had seen her since Mr. Munn had taken Polly from her arms. The neighboring towns were telegraphed to; but as the station-master had not

sold her a ticket, the only way she could have reached them was by walking. The woods were scoured by searchers, but not a trace of Topsy could they find. Mammy Rose was almost crazy with grief, for Topsy was her "baby," and although she wasted no affection on her when she was about, Mammy loved her very dearly ; and to think it was her Topsy who had made little Polly so sick was the last drop to make her cup of trouble overflow.

Polly did not improve. Her plump little cheeks became white and hollow, and her big blue eyes wild and unseeing. She did not know Katrine, nor any one, and Dr. McKinney looked more grave and troubled each day, and even at dinner with the minister he was sad and silent. Little Polly and all the family were very dear to the doctor, especially since he had come to know them as next-door neighbors.

Jack and Ben had their hands full these days, for there was much to be done at home, as well as the outside work to be attended to. Middy, who was gaining

her strength nicely when Polly became ill, was in a very nervous condition and unable to leave her room; and without Topsy, and Cousin Helen to help and advise, Katrine had her hands more than full. Charlie had errands to run to his heart's content, and his feet were kept in action all day between the "Nest" and Miss Madge's house, carrying messages from Cousin Helen about Polly's condition.

Regular business was not neglected, however, although every one was very kind, even the fussy doctor telling Hester she must invest in baker's bread, a thing which the fastidious man had always refused to touch, but which at this time he pretended to eat with much relish.

Imagine the doctor's surprise, however, on getting home late to tea on a Saturday night and finding deliciously plump hot rolls, fresh bread and cake, and Hester with a mysteriously pleased smile on her usually grim face. The doctor was tired and hungry, and he was more pleased even than Hester had expected him to be.

"Which of the neighbors honored us, Hester?" he asked. "Who sent 'em in?"

"Nobody," said Hester. "They were made in the house."

"Katrine surely hasn't been in, with all she has to do!" exclaimed the doctor.

"No," replied Hester mysteriously.

"You made them, Hester? They're almost as good as Miss Katrine's, I declare!"

Hester shook her head. "It was Mr. Jack," said she.



CHAPTER XI

DARK HOURS

CHRISTMAS was upon the little family in the "Nest" before they realized it ; only ten days were left to prepare so many things that had been undertaken. Katrine's hands were full indeed, with commissions from many people who were too busy or too lazy to make their own presents, and her needle and brush fairly flew. Cousin Helen, who was an artist, had given her a number of lessons in decorating, and Katrine was so apt a pupil that she gained quite a reputation for her tasty little figures and decorations, and her original designs for embroidery were eagerly sought for. Work piled up so that Middy had to come to her daughter's help. Polly, but a faint shadow of her former rosy, roly-poly self, had been brought home from the Winters', and

“Spinner” took entire care of her, for she needed very careful watching. Dr. McKinney had pronounced her out of danger, but the baby did not seem to improve; she grieved for Topsy and asked for her every day in the most pitiful way.

Not a word had been heard from Topsy; she had disappeared as entirely as if the mouth of the earth had suddenly opened and swallowed her. Poor Mammy Rose looked sad and worn, and complained that she was growing old. She could think of nothing but her lost Topsy, and her tears fell so freely that they interfered with her work.

“If Jack and Company were any good at all they’d find Topsy for you, Mammy,” said Sally one day. “They’re supposed to be able to do any and everything.”

“No pusson cud do nuffin’,” replied Mammy, wiping the tears from her eyes. “Mammy’s own li’l’ gal done bin speerited away. Topsy, she was de bestest li’l’ da’ter Mammy Rose eber had, an’ now dere’s no one ter keer fer Mammy in her ole age.”

“Poor Mammy!” said Sally, patting her arm affectionately; and just then a plan flashed through her mind. She and Paul held a very secret conversation, with the result that their father was consulted, and two small heads bent over two small savings-bank books, and the figures were added up, and some subtraction done, which did not leave very much of a balance in the books.

“There!” cried Sally. “If, as you say, papa, some one may be keeping Topsy in the hope of getting a reward, that ought to tempt him. Listen:

“‘One hundred dollars reward for information as to the whereabouts of a colored girl, thirteen years old, named Topsy Pink, strayed from Cicero, November 31st.’”

“Are you sure you want to do it?” asked Mr. Waldron.

“Yes,” they cried together.

“If it will bring Topsy back and make Mammy and little Polly Drury stop grieving it is certainly worth trying,” said Sally. “I don’t know what-

ever I should have done with the money, anyhow."

"I'll add another hundred to it," said Mrs. Waldron, who had entered the library quietly, and had heard the conversation.

"Really, mother?" cried Sally delightedly, clapping her hands. "Just think, Paul, two hundred dollars! That ought to find her."

"I can't let your mother be more generous than I am," said Mr. Waldron, laughing. "Suppose you make it three hundred, chicks, and if she isn't found by Christmas Eve I'll make it five."

"Hurray for father!" shouted Paul. "Now that's what I call a handsome thing to do. Come on, Sally; we must put the advertisement in the *Cicero Local*—and where else, father?"

"In all the papers of the surrounding villages, and put notices in the post-offices, too, I think," replied Mr. Waldron. "You must engineer it yourself, Paul."

So Paul and Sally ordered the carriage

and started out, ending their labors by putting a notice in six little village papers and as many post-offices. And then they drove to the "Nest," to tell their wonderful plan to the Drurys. They had intended to wait until their friends saw the notices, but the temptation to see how they received the news was too great, and they drove up just as lunch was over. They were greeted with cheers and shouts when they told their news; for with three hundred dollars offered, the Drury children had no doubt that whoever was detaining Topsy would jump at such bait. Middy and Spinner were not as sanguine, but they were delighted with the kind thoughtfulness of the children's friends.

The offered reward, however, did not have immediate effect; but after a few days an answer came to the advertisement, in the shape of a colored man, who told of finding Topsy in the woods, and after a great deal of trouble and expense with doctors, bringing the apparently exhausted child to life.

"Whar am she?" demanded Mammy

Rose excitedly. "Wot color eyes hab de chile, man?"

"She am safe," declared the man. "Her eyes am—well, her eyes am magenta."

"Dat's her sho!" exclaimed Mammy, rushing for her shawl and preparing to go with the man.

"I doan' show de gal till I gits de money," declared the man doggedly.

"You most certainly will not get the money until we have seen the child," said Mr. Waldron. "Where is she?"

"At Boxboro—thirty miles off," said the darky. "An' I done spent my las' cent ter get hyar."

Paul, who had been away on his wheel, happened back just at this time.

"Topsy's foun'!" cried Mammy joyfully, as she saw him. Then the case was explained to Paul, who drew his father aside for a moment.

"There's a rickety old wagon on Cross Lane with a darky girl holding the horse," said he, "and I shouldn't wonder if she is the girl he is trying to make us

think is Topsy; she is about the size of Topsy. I didn't think of it being she, or I'd have stopped. I'll go right back now."

"Wait," said Mr. Waldron. "If it were Topsy, she would have come right over here to her mother."

"But, father, she's never been here; and anyway she doesn't know the country around here, so she'd have to wait there until the man came back."

"You are right," agreed Mr. Waldron. "I'll engage the man's attention if you can get Mammy Rose quietly out to the buggy—it's waiting at the stable door—and drive over. We couldn't keep her here until you go, for she would insist upon starting off with the man. She has gone for her hat—hurry or she will come out this side of the house."

Paul caught Mammy on the stairs, and hurriedly telling her what he had seen, they started off together, Mammy's face fairly transformed with joy.

"It probably isn't Topsy, Mammy," said Paul, fearing it might not be, and

that the disappointment would be more than she could bear.

"It's jes' sure certain ter be," declared Mammy. "Mammy's own li'l' Topsy!" she kept murmuring to herself, "Mammy's own li'l' los' chile come back at las'."

When Cross Lane was reached the girl was still there, and as they approached the wagon Mammy leaned forward to look at her, then sank back in her seat with a groan. At the same moment Paul perceived that she was a dirty, stupid-looking child, and in no way resembling bright, neat little Topsy.

Without a word they turned back. By the time they had reached the gate Mammy was sitting bolt upright. Mr. Waldron was still talking to the man, who seemed to be growing a trifle uneasy. The horse stopped, and Mammy, with a bound that would have been a credit to her little daughter, was on the ground, with the horsewhip in her hand.

"You!" she shrieked, giving the man a terrible blow with the whip.

The man took to his heels, Mammy running after him with remarkable agility, flourishing the whip and stammering, "Y-y-you!" the only word she could seem to manage in her terrible indignation. The whip did not touch him again, however, for he quickly doubled the distance between himself and Mammy.



After this Mammy hobbled back and took to her bed with a bad attack of rheumatism, and insisted that she was "gwine die fo' sho."

As for the man, he disappeared, and that was the last they heard of or saw of him.

CHAPTER XII

BEN USES HIS WITS

NOTHING further occurred in answer to the advertisements, except that a great many people volunteered the information that they had seen, within the last week, a colored girl who might answer Topsy's description. But nothing came of this information. Paul and Sally were discouraged when the day before Christmas came, for there was not very much Christmas feeling about when Mammy was so heartbroken. The day before they had been at the "Nest," and had heard Polly, with tears streaming down her face, run to the chimney and cry:

"O Tammy Taus, Tammy Taus, if oo'll b'ing back Powy's Topsy, Powy don't want no pussy-tat, nor bunny, nor tandy, nor nuffin'."

"It's—it's awful!" declared Sally to

the March Hares. "I don't care about giving a soul a thing for Christmas, and I don't care one bit about the New Year's party."

"Nor I—nor I," came from every side.

"I'll tell you just why it is," said Prue. "It's because the Drurys aren't Hares. I'm not ashamed to confess it—I've fallen in love with 'em all."

"That's just it exactly!" cried Sally. "And if you knew the rest of the family you'd be fonder of 'em still. Maybe you'll think I'm a traitor—but, say, Hares, let's reform our constitution, so we can take some more members in."

There was silence for a moment, so stunned were they by this unheard-of proposition, for they had rigorously denied admittance to all comers; and then every hare of them jumped up with a wild yell of acquiescence.

Some talking and planning was done that afternoon, and when the meeting broke up Paul and Sally looked more cheerful.

“I don’t believe it is of any use to raise the reward,” said Paul, preparing to go the rounds of the post-offices on his bicycle, to carry out his father’s offer. “But it will not hurt to try. Good-by, Sally.”

There certainly was no prospect of a merry Christmas at the “Nest,” for the whole family felt sad. But work is good to help one forget a sorrow, and they threw themselves heart and body into work. Ben, that Christmas Eve, was sent for to go up to the Rockery to help pack a number of presents to be despatched that night, and he worked away with a will, stuffing the vacant spaces in the boxes with bunches of straw or rolls of old newspapers, a pile of which was at his elbow. It was nine o’clock, and he was very tired and sleepy, and glad that the last box was filled and ready for the cover. He slowly selected the nails to fasten the cover, and drove the first one in crooked, then pulled it out, and seeing a corner which needed an extra bit of filling, he reached over and took a piece of newspaper from the pile

that had been steadily diminishing all the evening. There was a picture of a new thrashing-machine, which was interesting to Ben, for he had a good head for machinery, and was fond of every kind. From the picture his attention strayed to the paragraph following, and in a minute every bit of sleepiness vanished from his eyes, and they were big and round with excitement. This is what he saw :

“The first occupant of the children’s ward in our hospital is a stranger. She is a little colored girl, some twelve years old. No one knows where she came from, and as she is unable to speak, or even to move, it is possible the authorities may never know anything about her. Dr. Bryce pronounces it a very critical case, and gives it as his impression that the child has been starved. She was brought to the hospital by a railroad employee, who says she was taken from a freight-car which stopped a few minutes at the station. No one on the car knew anything about her, but the general opinion is that she was a ‘stowaway.’ ”

It might be Topsy, though how Topsy could be on a freight-train was more than

Ben stopped to explain to himself. The paper was only a piece which had been torn to pack with, and there was no word to tell where the hospital was located. In a minute the carefully packed box was unpacked and the contents on the floor, while Ben was on his knees carefully searching for every little bit of paper that could once have belonged to the sheet. It was almost a Chinese puzzle, but it was finally accomplished, and Ben was in possession of the information that the hospital was in a small though flourishing town in Indiana.

With more haste than care the box was packed again and the lid nailed on ; and with his precious bit of information in his pocket Ben was more than ready to go home.

Mr. Hewing, who had never been very high in favor with the Drury family, probably only for the reason that he occupied their dear old home, seemed much pleased with the work Ben had done. He did not offer to pay for it on the spot, however, as Ben had hoped he would do ; for

Ben had a project on hand which he did not propose to divulge to any one at present, and for which some money was needed immediately, while he had not a cent in his pocket. He had too much pride to ask Mr. Hewing for his evening's earnings, so he said good night as pleasantly as he could, considering that Mr. Hewing had totally overlooked the fact that the wish of a "Merry Christmas" goes a long way on a cold Christmas Eve to cheer a boy who has always made much of such greetings; and went off, thinking deeply for one who is not given to harboring many thoughts but those of fun and mischief.

It would not do to ask the treasurer for money, for suspicions would be aroused; he would have to borrow of somebody. But of whom?

The clatter of horses' hoofs answered the question for him, and in a minute he had hailed the very man you would think he would have avoided—Dr. McKinney.

"Hi, there!" called Ben sharply in

his free and easy manner. "Hullo, Dr. McKinney! Stop a moment, will you?"

The doctor pulled up shortly. "Who is it? What's wanted? Some of the Rockery people sick?" he called.

The doctor was alone, and Ben climbed into the buggy, without another word, before the doctor had time to see who it was.

"You young footpad!" he cried wrathfully, when he distinguished Ben. "If I had known it was you I wouldn't have stopped. What monkey tricks are you up to at this time of night?"

"Just what I thought, doctor," said Ben calmly, tucking the robe snugly about his feet. He wasn't a bit afraid of Dr. McKinney and his blustering ways. Ben had an idea he knew just one thing about the doctor which gave him an advantage, for he was quite sure the doctor would come to any terms rather than have this thing known. Oh, Ben was a far-sighted youngster indeed!

"I've a mind to throw you over-

board," said Dr. McKinney. "You look as if you were up to mischief."

"All right," said Ben, settling himself comfortably on the cushions. "Go ahead, doctor; it's a pity people are born with their looks, isn't it? But, I say, doctor——"

Ben hesitated a little, and his voice was not quite as saucy as usual, which made the doctor turn and look at him.

"What is it, jackanapes?"

"Will you lend me a couple of dollars, doctor?"

"*What!*" cried Dr. McKinney. "What do you want it for?"

"I can't tell," replied Ben.

"I'll make a bargain with you," said the doctor slowly. "If you'll answer me two questions, and promise me you'll get into no great mischief with it—you're bound to get into some kind, I suppose—why, I'll do it."

"All right," agreed Ben. "I'm willing. The money is for a Christmas present for the family, and——"

Dr. McKinney looked unbelieving.

“—and Cousin Helen,” finished Ben, looking at the doctor out of the tail of his eye.

The doctor tried to look as if he had not heard this, but by the way he whipped the horses Ben knew that he had, and he giggled under his breath.

“Fire away, doctor,” he said pleasantly. “I’m in earnest this time. I want the money, and I’ll pay it back in a couple of days.”

“It is yours,” said the doctor. “Now, who tied my horses the other day when I stepped into the Winters’ house while Polly was sick?”

“I did,” replied Ben innocently, while a smile stole over his face, discreetly turned away from the doctor, at the thought of how funny the doctor had looked when he tried to drive off with the horses securely tied to the hitching-post. “Did you think it safe to leave them untied?”

The doctor didn’t answer.

“What else?” asked Ben. “I want to get out at the station and send a tele-

gram," he added, with an important air, which made the doctor open his eyes in astonishment.

"Never mind the other," replied the doctor, who was a trifle afraid of Ben's saucy tongue.

"Thank you," said Ben, as he jumped from the buggy. "I'll do as much for you some day. I'm quite sure you're not a bit too old for—" he started, and had just time to dodge a lash from the doctor's whip.

The telegram Ben sent was to the physician whose name was mentioned in the newspaper paragraph.

"Colored girl missing. Telegraph description patient children's ward. B. Drury."

CHAPTER XIII

A DEPARTURE AND A TELEGRAM

CHRISTMAS was the sort of a day that made you feel glad you were alive; brisk, clear air, and bright sunshine to warm you when your fingers tingled. B. Drury had an uncontrollable attack of the fidgets, which didn't add much to his happiness nor to the happiness of the family; but as he kept in constant motion between the telegraph office and the house, his fidgeting harmed no one but himself.

Polly was worse. Her little golden head lay almost motionless upon the pillow, and the big blue eyes, full of unshed tears, were wide open and restlessly moving to and fro; not even a plump little stocking from Santa Claus interested her. She smiled faintly at the little toys that would usually have brought forth peals

of laughter and delighted appreciation. She didn't say a word, but they all knew for what those big eyes were searching.

Dr. McKinney came in to see her, and to Cousin Helen, who followed him downstairs, he said that unless something could be done to keep the baby mind from dwelling on her lost Topsy, he was very much afraid that little Polly would speedily fade away.

"There's but one thing I can suggest, Miss Helen, and it must be tried if we wish to save her. You must take Polly South."

Cousin Helen looked grave. "I don't see how it is possible, doctor," she said.

"It must be done, and at once," said the doctor decidedly. "If it is not done, I won't answer for the child's life. If it is done, and nothing unforeseen occurs, she will pull through, I believe. You must go to Virginia, right where you can find lots of pickaninnies like Topsy. If money stands in your way, Miss Helen," the doctor added kindly, "do not bother about that. Mrs. Drury and I are old

enough friends to lend and borrow when occasion requires it. But I wouldn't worry her by talking of it, Miss Helen—time enough for those things when everything is straightened out."

"You are more than kind, doctor, but I dislike being so indebted to you when we can never repay——"

Dr. McKinney's honest eyes were blazing with indignation.

"Pay fiddlesticks, Miss Helen!" he cried. "You—I—we——" the doctor was getting very much twisted. "I'm going to buy tickets and make arrangements at once," he finished gruffly. "You start to-night. Where is the old Cubberly home?"



"Passed into other hands," said Spinner sadly. "But I think—yes, I'm quite sure—that a distant cousin of mine will take us if we write——"

"Write fiddlesticks!" exclaimed the

doctor, snapping his fingers at the idea. "Of course she'll take you in; but you must go, at any rate," and he jotted down the name of the cousin and small town; and before Cousin Helen could say another word he had gone to make arrangements, as he had threatened.

That was a busy Christmas day for all at the "Nest." Bags were packed and plans were made with surprising rapidity. Everybody had some suggestion to offer or some little thing to do which would add to the comfort of the travelers on their night's journey. The treasurer was called upon for some money; no one but she and Cousin Helen knew that Dr. McKinney had a finger in the pie, and that he had paid the greater part of the expenses. It worried them somewhat, for the doctor had not been paid a cent for all his services in either Middy's or Polly's illness; but what could one do with such a man? He had never even sent in a bill, and you might just as well try to persuade him to do what he didn't want to do as to expect Bunker Hill to step down

to New York for the asking. Little Polly was to be carried to the train, and at four o'clock Dr. McKinney appeared and superintended packing her into a huge, warm bundle.

"She'll come back all right in a couple of weeks," he said to Katrine. "Don't look so frightened," he added crossly. "You must laugh and be jolly, and keep the others in spirits. If you—if you *cry*," a deep frown appeared on his pleasant brow, "I—you'll be responsible for my life, for I vow if you shed a tear I'll make my own bread and pies and cake forever afterward!"

"Gracious goodness!" cried Katrine, with as much of a smile as she could muster. "I'll try not to make you commit suicide, doctor, but I just feel as if the tears *would* come. Do you—do you really and truly think—are you *sure* that Polly will come back home again?" And the tears that Katrine had said were ready to start, showed themselves, and one really rolled down her face and disappeared in her lap.

“Here!” cried the doctor, “stop that—not another one, or I’ll get somebody else to do my cooking for me. No one is *sure* that to-morrow will come; but I am as sure that Polly will come back—but it is possible she may be no better, mind—as I am that there will be a to-morrow. Now, look pleasant again, for goodness’ sake, and I’ll whisper a secret to you, if you’ll promise not to tell till six o’clock to-night.”

“I’ll promise if it’s nothing wrong,” said Katrine, smiling through her tears. She looked upon the doctor as a very big boy of whom she had especial charge, and as she knew he liked to joke, she was always chary with her promises.

“Well,” said the doctor, bending over till his lips were close to her ear, “*I’m going too!*”

With a cry of delight, Katrine flung her arms about his neck and hugged him.

“Please excuse me, doctor, but I’m *so* glad!” she cried. “I must run and tell Middy—it will cheer her up.”

"Here, ma'am — how about your promise?" called the doctor, catching her dress.

"Oh—did you *mean* that? Can't I tell yet?"

"No," answered he. "There'd be a terrible howdy-do; but if I get on the train, and the train starts before I get off, there's no help for it—see?"

"Oh!" said Katrine.

"Yes," repeated the doctor sheepishly. "There might be an awful howdy-do. I've arranged everything—and I want a holiday; if your mother needs a doctor send for Dr. Clarke. He will take charge of my patients. That's better—you look pleasanter now."

"Yes," said Katrine, "I *feel* better—but I'm just aching to tell."

"Tell what?" asked Ben, opening the door. "Have you a secret too?"

"*Too?*" asked Katrine. "Have you one? I'll tell you mine at six o'clock to-night."

"Perhaps I'll tell you something too," said Ben mysteriously.

“*He* has a secret, the young monkey!” said the doctor. “What do you suppose he did last—” but fortunately for Ben, Cousin Helen announced just then that all was ready, and in a few minutes the procession was on the way to the train, leaving some sad faces at home; and more at the station when the train puffed out, with Cousin Helen wildly gesticulating to the unperturbed doctor to make him leave the train before it was too late.

The doctor’s secret was no sooner disclosed to the family, than Ben rushed in breathless, waving a telegram above his head and shouting:

“Has Topsy a birthmark on her left upper arm?”

“Hush!” called Katrine; “Middy’s trying to rest. Let me see. What is it—a telegram?”

“Yes,” said Ben excitedly. “Where’s Jack? Say, Jack, come listen to this: ‘Colored girl; brown dress; white apron; turban; birthmark left upper arm. Dr. Bryce.’”

And in answer to the questions asked in rapid succession by Jack and Katrine, Ben told his secret, and how he hoped this was Topsy.

"I hope it is," sighed Katrine, reading the slip of newspaper carefully, "but it can't be, Benny. Topsy could never have gone to Indiana, and there may be a hundred girls dressed in brown dresses and turbans."

"Hundreds," agreed Jack. "You've just wasted the money on telegrams. Where did you get the money, anyhow?"

"But about the mark?" asked Ben, ignoring the question. "Don't you know, Katrine?"

Katrine shook her head.

"Wouldn't Middy know?" asked Ben.

"Of course not," said Katrine. "It can't possibly be Topsy, anyway, Ben. She couldn't have been on a freight-car."

Ben's confidence in his telegram was a trifle shaken by the cool view Jack and

Katrine took of the matter; but not entirely discouraged, he started out on the long walk to the Waldrons' house to consult Mammy Rose on the important point.



CHAPTER XIV

TWO SURPRISES

“TWO? Did you say it was only just *two*, Katrine? Are you sure the clock isn't fast or slow or something?”

“It's just right by the church clock,” said Jack, answering for Katrine, who had her mouth too full of pins to do anything but grunt. “And the church clock is connected with one of the sun's beams, Charlie, so that it can't possibly be fast or slow.”

“But what does it do on rainy days, then?” asked Charlie, stopping his whistling long enough to look at Jack in astonishment.

“I can't tell you unless I'm paid for it,” said his brother, “and I'm afraid to trust you. I can't do business for nothing.”

"He's teasing you," said Katrine, sticking the last pin in the hat she was trimming. "Do stop, Jack. It's more disagreeable to tease than it is to pester a person with questions. Mr. Manning said the clock was right when he was here this morning, Charlie; that's the reason we know it is right."

"And the train gets in at three?" asked Charlie.

"Yes—and oh, won't we be glad to see them all again! Just think, six whole weeks since they left, and nearly three months since Topsy was lost! Doesn't it seem queer that everything has turned out all right? I reckon that's why Middy is feeling so well—there's nothing to worry about at all, and only things to be glad for."

"And the train comes in at three," said Ben, who was full of importance, for hadn't he been the cause of half of the excitement to-day? "Mr. Manning will be here with the carriage at twenty minutes of, Katrine. I bet old Nebuchadnezzar will be as glad to see the doc. as

we will be to have Polly and Spinner back."

"We'll *all* be glad," declared Katrine. "And won't they be surprised to see Middy out! Just think, this is the first time since we came to the 'Nest' that she has been able to go! I'm so glad, I don't know what to do!" And Katrine clasped her hands ecstatically, regardless of the hat she was crushing.

"I'm going with Middy," said Charlie.

"No, you're not," said Jack decidedly. "Katrine's going with her, and then Spinner and Polly will ride home while she walks. You can come with us."

As Jack finished his sentence the doorbell rang loudly.

"Jiminy! I hope it isn't a *customer*!" exclaimed Ben. "Suppose it should be, just when we are going to meet them, too."

"Well, go open the door and see," said Katrine. "I must run up-stairs and help Middy dress."

It proved to be Mammy, decked out

in her best, for to-day was a gala-day for her. The girl in the Indiana hospital had proved to be Topsy. She was to meet the doctor and Cousin Helen in the city, and they were all expected on the three-o'clock train. There was no doubt now that the girl was Topsy, for there had been several letters exchanged between the hospital doctor and the "Nest" people, and as soon as Topsy came to herself she had asked for Mis' 'Trine and Polly; and now she had recovered sufficiently to be sent back, the doctor writing to B. Drury, Esq., who had conducted the whole affair, that he thought as soon as she was at home again she would gain her strength. Mammy, who had been positive that the girl was Topsy from the time Ben had waved the telegram before her eyes, now began to be doubtful. She had come over to meet the train, however, in spite of her doubt.

"I clar to goodness, Mis' Lucy, dat ar li'l' nigger gal cyan't be Mammy's Topsy; I jes' doan' believe hit."

"What are you here for, then, Mam-

my?" asked Katrine, laughing, and helping arrange her mother's dress.

"Sho', yo' did'n' s'pose Mammy came ter meet a li'l' nigger gal! Ain' Polly an' Miss Helen comin' back?"

"Yes, of course, but you can't fool us, Mammy. You wouldn't have come all this way and in this style for Cousin Helen and Polly," laughed Katrine. "And you know there's just a *small* chance that the 'li'l' nigger' may be Topsy."

"Bress de Lord!" whispered Mammy. Just then the bell rang again, and in a minute Ben, who had answered the call, appeared at the door.

"It's all up, Katrine," he called. "Here's an order for you. It's little Willie Brown; he says his mother wants you right away; she thinks their kitten is going to have another fit."

"Oh dear, oh dear! tell him I *can't* go," cried Katrine. "I am going down with Middy, you know, and that upsets everything."

"You would better go, dear," said Mrs. Drury. "If you are not back in

time, Mammy can ride down with me; hurry, and you will be able to get to the station on time."

"All right, if you say so, Middy, dear. Mammy, take good care of her if I don't get back here," cautioned Katrine, and off she rushed to rub some turpentine under the kitten's chin and on its chest to prevent the fit, as she had long ago promised she would do when next necessary.

As she ran out she caught sight of Ben and Jack, with long faces too; for they had just received a call to move some trunks at once for a Miss Weatherby, a delightful little old lady who lived all alone; the work wasn't hard or long, and by hurrying they certainly could manage to reach the station at train time.



As the three-o'clock train steamed into Cicero, a breathless girl, her two flaxen pig-tails flying behind her, ran up from

one side, while from the opposite direction came two boys, on a dog-trot. Their mother was waiting in the carriage with Mr. Manning; and Mammy, her heart palpitating with joy and her hands nervously clasping and unclasping each other, was waiting on the platform, with a big tear of joy now and then rolling over her fat black cheeks.

As the engine puffed into the station the Waldrons' carriage drove up, and out jumped Sally and Paul. But the Drurys had no time to pay attention to them, for there was the doctor, hale and hearty and smiling, helping out Cousin Helen, who looked like a beautiful, delicate pink rose; and then a small black girl who was unmistakably Topsy, with a jubilant golden-haired baby clasping her neck.

With a wild and delighted cry, Polly sprang into Katrine's arms, and was carried to Middy, while there were kissing and hand-shaking and laughter among the others.

Mammy's big arms enveloped Topsy in a long and enormous hug, while tears

rained on the little darky's tightly curled wool. Suddenly recollecting herself, she took her erring daughter by the shoulders and shook her sharply.

"Yo' li'l' no 'count nigger—whar yo' been? What yo' mean by runnin' away f'om yo' ole Mammy an' disgracin' the fambly? Jes' wait till Mammy gets yo' home! Whar yo' been an' what yo' been a-doin'?"

Topsy looked thin—and pale for her—but she was the same old Topsy. After she had received Mammy's caresses, and hugged and kissed her in return, she said she had been "seein' de worl'."

"Yo' is a monst'ous trabeled li'l' nigger," said Mammy proudly, her face relaxing into a smile. "What yo' done t'ink ob Indiany?"

But what Topsy thought of Indiana and her trip is a topic of conversation for the rest of her life, and not to be told in two minutes. Her little black hand was almost shaken off when the Drurys and Waldrons finished saying how glad they were to see her back again, and an ad-

miring group gathered about her to hear how she reached Indiana.

“’Twus after I done killed Polly,” commenced Topsy in an awed voice. “I jes’ cud feel de hangman’s rope comin’ after me, an’ I done run—faster nor Mas’r Jack—an’ I seen suthin’ in front, an’ I jump in wid my eyes tight shut an’ crawl inter a corner; an’ I done keep my eyes tight shet ’cose ef dey was open I see de hangman comin’!”

“Well—what next?” asked Ben, as Topsy hesitated.

“I done have de highstrikes, I reck’n, Marse Ben; an’ w’en dey’s ober I want sumpin’ ter eat mighty bad, an’ I opens one eye a teenty bit and looks around; it’s mos’ly dark, an’ a big room filled with bags ob sumpin’; an’ den I knows de hangman’s kotch me an’ put me in prisun; an’ de prisun was rockin’ like a boat, an’ a-boomin’ an’ a-sizzlin’ an’ a-snortin’——”

“The freight-car!” exclaimed Ben.

“’Twas de queerest jail yo’ eber seed, Marse Ben,” continued Topsy gravely,

“an’ I done wonder ef dey gives li’l’ niggers onyt’ing ter eat; an’ I listens fur de janglin’ ob de keys w’en dey comes ter bring de supper. But I only hears a soun’ like I done tole Polly afore she was kilt—‘ketch a nigger, chuck ’im under—ketch a nigger, chuck ’im under’—an’ den I knows as how Mammy tole me ef a li’l’ nigger did sumpin’ wrong her consequence ’d keep a-prickin’ ob her.” Topsy paused again.

“And then?” they asked in chorus.

“Den I reck’n I done had de high-strikes again after playin’ I was eatin’ eels an’ toas’ an’ strawberries an’ peanuts. Dat’s all I ’members till one time I done open my eyes in de horspittle.”

“It was *I* who found you, Topsy,” said Ben proudly.

“I’s much obleeged, Marse Ben, I is,” said Topsy, dropping a little courtesy.

“We’re all of us terribly glad,” cried Sally, hopping up and down in her excitement. “Now’s the time, Paul,” she added in a whisper, nudging his elbow, whereupon he pulled an envelope out of

his pocket and handed it solemnly to Ben.

Ben looked at it with a puzzled air, and then opened it. Out fell a little pink slip of paper, and a white slip on which was written "Reward for finding Topsy Pink."

The pink slip was a check for five hundred dollars.

Then there was laughing and exclaiming and congratulating, you may be sure; and explaining how Ben had really found Topsy on Christmas eve. There was so much noise that the doctor hurried from the baggage-room to see what was the matter.

"I done earned fibe hunderd dollars fo' de comp'ny," explained Topsy in an awestruck manner.

"It seems to me you're making a great deal of fuss over Topsy," said the doctor gruffly, leading the way across the platform to the carriage, "and not a bit over me. I told you I'd pay you back, Miss Katrine, and get another cook when you would look so solemn

the day we left—and I've gone and done it!"

Howls of laughter greeted this speech, and "Who—what—where is she?" asked everybody.

"I don't see her—I don't believe it. Did he, Spinner?" asked Katrine.

Cousin Helen laughed and blushed, and as she hesitated the doctor answered for her.

"Come, right about face for home, or we'll all be invalids again," he called. "Well, if you don't believe me, just you wait and see." To every one's amazement he turned and took Cousin Helen's hand, then making a profound bow to everybody: "Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to present to you the future Mrs. McKinney, who has supplanted——"

A murmur, a buzz, and then a roar of delight interrupted him, in which he made more noise than all of the others, tossing up his hat in the air like any schoolboy and proposing three cheers for everybody, especially for the lady whom he said would turn from Miss Spinner to

Mrs. Cooker, and cook up delight for everybody. The cheers were given with a will by everybody, and Polly, sitting in Middy's lap, clapped her hands delightedly and cried:

“'Ook at Powy's funny tousin-doctor!”



Topsy had been back in the "Nest" for a day.

CHAPTER XV

A SECRET

“WHEN I wuz in Indiany,” said Topsy solemnly, as she wrung out the dish-towels and hung them up to dry, “dey wuz a nangel dere.”

She had only been back in the “Nest” for a day, and she was still a little subdued. Mrs. Drury and Mrs. Waldron had insisted that Mammy should take Topsy home with her for a week before she started in again at her duties in the “Nest,” but Mammy had sturdily refused.

“Dat ar li’l’ nigger gal gwine play no mo’,” she declared. “Dey’s ben ’nuff trubble fur Mis’ Lucy an’ Mis’ Katrine, an’ ez fer Topsy, she ain’ neber been sick ; she’s jes’ perwarycatin’.” She said she would not now believe a word about Topsy being in the hospital. So Topsy

had spent one night with Mammy—Sally afterward told Katrine that they had talked all night—and then had gone back to the “Nest” and to work.

“Yessum, a white nangel,” Topsy continued solemnly at Katrine’s look of unbelief. “She didn’t hab no wings, but ef she had she’d jest er flew ter de sky an’ neber come down no mo’.”

Katrine laughed. “If you want me to believe any more of your wonderful tales, Topsy, you will have to prove them,” she said.



“Dat I kin, Mis’ ’Trine. W’en Mis’ Nangel she come roun’ ter see me I dasn’t open my eyes, but I done peek froo at her a teenty bit, ’cause ef

a li’l black nigger like me done look at a nangel she gwine fade away. An’ ez yo’ know, Mis’ Kat—’Trine, I mean—ef yo’ opens yo’ eyes too wide den all de

badness done show troo fer sho'. She tell me doan be feared, an' she call me po' li'l' gal widout any mammy. Den when I gits better she done tole me she'd fine out whar I come from, and de doctor he say her name's Miss Sylvia Nangel, an' den he squeeze her han'. She done gib me dis yere," and Topsy displayed a tiny silver piece on a string, which, sure enough, was polished and marked "S. A." "She say dis yere's a charm when I done scream an' holler 'cause de ha'nts gwine git me."

"The ha'nts will come fly away with you some day," said Ben teasingly, as he passed through the kitchen. "Whew! what's this coming?"

The three crowded to the little window, and beheld a large covered wagon, filled with odd-looking boxes of all sorts and descriptions, with Dr. McKinney seated beside the driver, and looking like the happiest man on earth.

"What under the sun!" cried Katrine. "Oh, it's wedding things, perhaps. Do you suppose he and Spinner

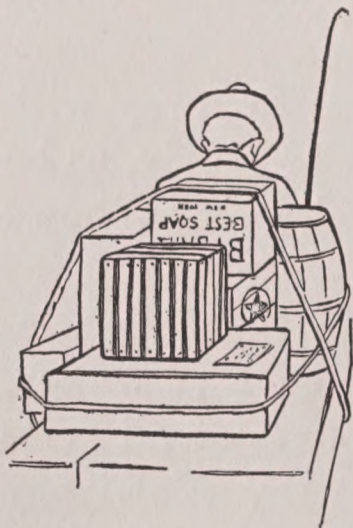
are going to be married right away? I've asked them both, but Spinner only blushes, and says to ask the doctor, and the doctor looks very mysterious, and says that a ten years' engagement is about right for young people like them. I'm going to ask her this minute," and she ran up-stairs in search of Spinner.

Cousin Helen was with Mrs. Drury in the sitting-room, with a big note-book and a pen, and looking as busy as ten

bees, while Mrs. Drury was sewing on some white stuff Katrine had never seen before.

"O Spinner," she exclaimed breathlessly, "*do* look out and see your doctor man, and then tell me, please, if it really means——?"

Spinner laughed heartily when she saw the doctor, and he looked up and made a most exaggerated bow to the trio in the window, and kissed his hand to them.



"He isn't old enough for you to marry, Spinner, dear," said Katrine. "Not that you are a bit old," she hastened to add, "but that he is so young. Why, he ought to be in kilts yet—he needs as much looking after as a baby."

"You'll have to help me take care of him and keep him in order," said Cousin Helen, putting her arm affectionately about Katrine and kissing her. "And you'll have a chance very soon, for——"

"O Spinner, *are* you going to be married soon? *Do* tell me when!"

"Well, it is not to be a very great wedding," answered Spinner, "but we are to be quietly married at the church by Mr. Manning just ten days from to-day."

"How perfectly lovely!" cried Katrine, throwing her arms about Cousin Helen's neck and giving her a tremendous hug. "It is so nice to have you marry the doctor, Spinner, because everything will be just the same, and Mrs. McKinney won't mind my running in there and ordering him around, will you? Just sup-

pose he had taken Miss Houston, for instance. She's very nice—but if I should run over there she would say: 'What do you wish, little girl? Oh, no, the doctor can not see you; he is engaged with some medical statistics which require his undivided attention.' And just as like as not he'd be skylarking down in the kitchen, trying to find the raisins—only she wouldn't let on. I advise you to hide the raisins and molasses and brown sugar, Spinner. What *are* you going to wear, and what are *we* going to wear, and how is it all to be done, and who's to be invited, and where——”

“Let us settle one question at a time,” laughed Spinner. And then began a long consultation, in which Katrine took a very active part. When it was finished, a very important member of the firm ran down-stairs to tell the others that Spinner was to wear her mother's beautiful wedding-dress of white satin, that Polly was to be the flower-girl, and that Sally Waldron was to be asked that afternoon to be a bridesmaid with Katrine; that Ka-

trine was to have a new white dress for the occasion made of some beautiful fluffy stuff Cousin Helen had put away when her sister died a year before; and that Jack and Ben, and even Charlie, were to be ushers, and Paul was asked to help. As for the maid of honor, Cousin Helen thought it too short notice to ask any of her friends from her Southern home, and that, at any rate, they would be too busy with their own entertainments at that time of the year, so she wrote some sweet letters telling them she was to be married quietly, and decided to ask Miss Madge Winters, who had been such a very good friend to the family, and who was such a sweet little woman.

Of course, when the doctor heard all the plans, he insisted that if Spinner did not ask her Southern friends he would not send for his college chums, and so he arranged to have the boys for ushers—much to Mr. Manning's amusement, for he knew that the doctor would have preferred to have girls—and for best man he asked Mr. Kendrick Munn, whom he had

known for a long while, and who, with Mrs. Winters and her daughter, they had all grown to like so well.

The children all regretted that they were not in the Rockery, in order that Spinner might have a wedding better suited to her, but she declared that the wedding would be very jolly, and she was just as happy as if she were to receive her friends in a castle. There was to be a reception, after the marriage at the church, and the "Nest" and Dr. McKinney's house were to be connected by a covered walk. It was all Spinner's idea, and the little fund of money which her sister long ago had put aside for "little Helen's wedding" was taken from the bank and made use of. It was a busy two weeks for Jack and Company, for the entire arrangements were in their hands—the decorating of the houses and catering for the guests (under Spinner's direction)—for almost every one in Cicero was asked to the reception, and also a number of people who lived farther out in the country. Beside this work, the

doctor was making alterations in his house, in which only Katrine and Jack were initiated—not even Spinner was to hear a word about them till the wedding-day. And they had a deal of fun mixed with the work, joking with the doctor while helping him, until he and Jack became quite friendly.

Ben felt rather insulted that he should be entirely overlooked in helping the doctor settle his house, but he still felt his importance in having earned the large sum of five hundred dollars for finding Topsy. Mrs. Drury refused to let him accept the amount at first, but Mr. Waldron called upon her one day and explained the matter fully.

“It would have been paid to any one who happened to find the child,” he said. “The matter was started by Paul and Sally, who take such great interest in your children and in their old Mammy, and I know it would be a very great disappointment to them if you refuse to let Ben have the reward. Please reconsider, Mrs. Drury.”

"It was a very generous thought of theirs," said Mrs. Drury, "but it doesn't seem as if Ben had any right to the money, and I am sure he did not give it a thought when he found the newspaper notice."

"I believe he did not," replied Mr. Waldron. "I shall be sorry indeed to tell Paul and Sally that their plan to ease a mother's aching heart, and to restore the little nurse to your baby, of whom they are so fond, has failed. It will be a severe blow to them, for the fact that Ben was to have the reward has trebled the pleasure they felt in having the little darky found—though not found in consequence of the reward."

At last Mrs. Drury consented to let Ben keep the money, and, at Mr. Waldron's suggestion, to make his own plans for its disposition.

Ben was delighted, and in answer to Sally's inquiry as to just what he should do with it, he said he had a "plan" that he would tell her about shortly. That evening he made a very long call in se-

cret on Mr. Manning, and when he returned he found that all except Jack, who was studying by the dining-room lamp, had gone to bed.

"Time small boys were in bed," said Jack. "Where have you been? Middy's been worrying about your not being in before."

"I've been on business," laughed Ben merrily, and then he disappeared up-stairs to see Middy.

"You are late, my son," said Middy, as Ben sat on the side of the bed in the dark and put his face down to be kissed. "What kept you so long?"

"I was talking to Mr. Manning, Middy," said Ben, "and asking him a lot of questions."

"And has my son thought of what he will do with his money?"

"Yes," said Ben slowly. "Will you keep a secret till to-morrow, Middy?"



Then I'll tell you," and there followed a long whispered conversation so that Cousin Helen should not hear, and—

"You are mother's brave man," said Mrs. Drury as she kissed Ben again before he left the room; and that paid Ben for any sacrifice he might make.

CHAPTER XVI

JACK'S CHANCE

THE next morning at breakfast Ben was missing, and Jack said he was up early before *he* was awake.

"Marse Ben, he done light out long about seben," explained Topsy. "Said he hab an erran' to do fo' de ole Jedge an' he wouldn' be back fo' long time—said de coachman wuz sick an' de Jedge wanted him to dribe Mis' Jedge to Beverly fo' some shoppin'. Dis yere paper he done lef' fo' Marse Jack."

"Wonder what the kid's up to," said Jack, opening the little note. "It'll be fun to drive to Beverly to-day. Did he take the check to deposit in the bank, Middy?"

"Yes," answered his mother. "I told him to do it when he said last night that he had to be out at the Judge's by

eight to-day to go with Mrs. Scranton to Beverly. He said he wanted to do it all by himself, and I think he is safe with it. Mrs. Scranton will help him if necessary."

"What does the note say?" asked Charlie between his spoonful of oatmeal.

"Let Powy see!" cried the little owner of that name, deftly slipping down from her high chair and running around to climb into Jack's lap. "What's de masser wif my Dackie?" she cried in a minute, throwing both arms about his neck. "Dear Dackie, Powy 'oves 'oo."

Jack had opened and read the note, and his face was a study. He was so very quiet for a minute that Cousin Helen and Katrine thought something dreadful had happened, but Middy was quietly smiling. Jack looked at her.

"Did *you* know about it, Middy?" he asked. "Isn't there some mistake—is Ben in earnest?"

"Yes, dear, he is thoroughly in earnest, and it is his own thought. What does the note say?"

Jack handed it to his mother—the

first note Ben had ever written him—and she read aloud:

“DEAR OLD JACK: You can go to college with the prize money I got for finding Topsy—I’m going to put it in the bank for you to-day. Mr. Manning says you can pass the exams. this spring, and perhaps he can get a scholarship for you. Katrine and I can run the business all right. Your loving brother, BEN.”

“How perfectly *fine!*” cried Katrine, clapping her hands delightedly, while Charlie, taking advantage of a good time to make a noise, stood up in his chair, waved his napkin and spoon in the air, with ear-splitting shrieks of “Hurrah!” Middy put her hands over her ears to keep the noise out, and Cousin Helen laughed at Jack’s perplexed look. When Charlie had been induced to subside, Middy explained.

“It was his own thought entirely, and he has been talking it over with Mr. Manning. Ben’s idea is that if we have the five hundred dollars to help us out

while you're away, and to help you get a start, you can earn your way through."

"Couldn't I just!" exclaimed Jack, carrying Polly back and depositing her in the high chair. "Ben's a brick, Middy, but I can't do it."

"It is a noble offer," smiled Spinner. "Why can't you accept it, Jack?"

"Because I can't leave Middy," said Jack, "and because if any one goes to college it ought to be saved for Ben."

"Ben will not be ready to go for some years yet," said Middy, "and as for leaving me——"

"I'll take care of her," cried Katrine and Charlie in one breath.

"We'll all take the best care of her," said Cousin Helen. "She is so well now that I am sure she will be entirely strong and well by next summer; and the doctor and I will be here all the time."

"But it seems mean for me to go off and enjoy myself and leave you all at home to work," objected Jack. "No, I can't do it."

"Don't be silly," said Katrine. "If

I knew enough I'd go in a minute—if I had a chance.”

“Yes, dear, I think it will be best for you to take advantage of the chance; we will be able to get along very comfortably, though we will miss our big brother even more than we realize now. I want my children all to have the very best education possible, and we will hope that a way will open for Katrine very soon, and the others as the time comes.”

“Bravo!” cried Spinner. “That is the way to look at it, boys and girls. I propose three cheers for our noble secretary and his mother.”

And they were given with a will, after which Jack was persuaded that his mother's advice was the best; and he went off to work at the doctor's with a very light heart, and such very pleasant prospects before him, that it is a wonder he managed to keep his mind on his work.

It didn't take long for this piece of good news to travel. Of course, Dr. McKinney heard it from Spinner and Polly,

who were always at the door to meet him when he stopped at the "Nest" each morning as he started on his rounds; and he met Paul on horseback on the road, and Paul, delighted with the news, turned around to go right back to tell Sally about it.

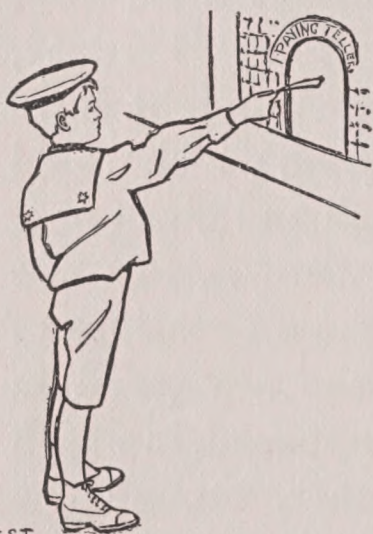
Meanwhile Ben, who had walked through the snow to the Judge's house, had started off with Mrs. Scranton in the sleigh toward Beverly. Under most circumstances, this would have been an eagerly sought for piece of work and pleasure combined, for the snow had fallen heavily and steadily until the sleighing was perfect, and the Judge's little horse, Bobbety, was full of fun, and had had so little exercise lately that she was glad to get out of the stable for a run. Mrs. Scranton had expected that Jack would come to drive her over—he had always done so when occasion required—and she did not feel safe with Ben at the end of the reins. But the old Judge cried "Pooh-pooh!" very loud indeed, and said he knew Ben was a careful

driver; so off they started. Mrs. Scranton was very nervous, and poor Ben spent a very uncomfortable hour on the way to Beverly. If he hadn't had his conscience stowed away in his pocket with that precious check to remind him of his duty, I am very much afraid there might have been an accident on purpose, which would have overturned the sleigh and given Mrs. Scranton cause for her worry. Ben was apt to forget his manners on occasions of this kind; he couldn't see any good in worrying *before* things happened, in which way he resembled Spinner, though she did not believe in worrying *afterward* either.

Beverly was reached at last, however, and Mrs. Scranton sighed with relief. Ben really was a very good horseman for his age, but she did not know that. She went to the bank with him and introduced him to the cashier, and then, leaving him to transact his business alone, she did her shopping.

It was very hard for Ben to think of parting with that check. He had come

to look upon it as a companion and friend, and now that he had practically given it to Jack, a great feeling of lonesomeness overcame him, together with an intense



desire to really have in his hands the money the check represented. So, without any more thought about it—Ben seldom wasted much time in thinking—he told the cashier he wanted the check cashed. As Mrs. Scranton had in-

troduced the boy, and as he had heard of the reward offered at Cicero, the cashier did not question Ben, but asked him how he wanted it. Ben said, "Oh, in big bills," in an offhand way, as if he were in the habit of handling hundred-dollar bills every day, and the cashier handed him out five crisp one-hundred-dollar bills. Ben put them safe in an old wallet of his father's he carried full of treasures. *Weren't* they beautiful? Each one

a hundred dollars! He had never seen anything larger than a ten-dollar bill before. Then, politely thanking the cashier for his trouble and his advice to "button your coat and keep an eye on it," Ben left the bank.

Now, Ben's motive was simply to have the pleasure of handling the money. He expected to go back to the bank later and ask the cashier to let him open an account and deposit the bills; but, alas! he forgot that the bank closed its doors tightly at two o'clock, and when at half-past two he went back there was no getting in.

"Hope there wasn't any tramp looking through the door when I got the bills," thought Ben. "I'll have to take 'em home, and bring 'em back to-morrow, somehow."

Mrs. Scranton was more easy in her mind on the way home, and the drive was very pleasant for Ben, who immediately forgot that he had five hundred dollars in his coat pocket.

"Benny, you're a trump from Way-

back," was Jack's greeting when Ben got back at five. "And I'll go to college if I can pass the exams., and I will earn enough money to send you through in style when the time comes," and Jack put his arm around Ben's neck and kissed him affectionately. That almost paid again for the sacrifice, for, to Ben, Jack was a very big boy, and greatly to be admired and respected.

CHAPTER XVII

AN ADVENTURE

POLLY always kissed the family awake. First she would crawl out of her own little trundle-bed into Katrine's, when she would kiss each eye open with such sweetness that not even the sleepest of mortals could be cross with her; and then, after the warm wrapper was buttoned over the little night-drawers and the warm red slippers on over her canton flannel covered feet, she would dance around the family and kiss them all so wide awake that they couldn't go to sleep again. She had hard work with Ben and Jack sometimes, for somehow the boys could go to sleep when she thought they were wide awake. This morning Ben was very refractory—she thought he was awake when she came into the room; he was tossing uneasily

and muttering in his sleep. But after many loving pats and caresses he really opened his eyes and seemed to understand it was time to get up, so with a parting admonition to "Det up, 'oo boys, tause Powy 'oves 'oo," she slipped down from the bed.

Ben had not passed a very comfortable night. In fact he had been pursued by a nightmare. He was trying to buy Topsy with a five hundred dollar check when it suddenly changed into five one hundred dollar bills in the shape of men with ugly green faces and big clubs in their hands, who told him they were bank detectives and had come to take him to jail. In vain he tried to explain that the money was his. They replied, "You gave it to Jack," and then they raised their clubs and started after him again. So it was a relief when he really opened his eyes to find he was in his own room, and that Jack and Charlie were yawning themselves awake too. The precious wallet was on the chair with his coat, and not daring to look at the prized

bills while Jack and Charlie were there, Ben put the wallet carefully in his drawer, locked it, and putting the key in his pocket, he drew on his clothes, heaving several sighs of relief.

It looked as if no opportunity would come for him to go to Beverly. However, by good luck it chanced that Miss Prim wanted to send a package to a Mrs. Small, who lived about half-way to Beverly; and Ben, who received the order, did not mention it to Jack for fear he would be directed to stay at home. Instead, he started off, before dinner, with Miss Prim's package under his arm and the wallet tightly buttoned up inside his coat. It was a bitter cold walk through the snow, and had it not been well packed in the roads, Ben would have found it an almost impossible journey. He reached Mrs. Small's house, delivered the package, and was quite glad to thaw out a little by the fire and to eat some buns which Mrs. Small offered him, having once had boys of her own and knowing that they are always ready to eat.

Then he made another start, and as the distance to Beverly shortened he grew more light-hearted and began to whistle. It *was* cold, and he wished he had the little horse he had driven yesterday. A crunching sound on the snow behind him told him of a horse and wagon coming, and Ben, without more ado, stepped to one side of the road and shouted: "I say, will you give me a ride?"

"Whoup!" called the driver, a burly colored man, to his bag-o'-bones horse. As Ben climbed in he saw a bundle of old clothes in the back of the wagon, in the middle of which was huddled what was apparently a little colored girl.

"Col' day," said the man to Ben, and then to the horse, "Gtchee—gtchee!" and they rattled and crunched along.

"Going to Beverly?" asked Ben.

"Yes—done goin' farder," said the man, eying Ben carefully. "I'll take yo' to Bev'ly fur ten cents."

"I haven't got any money," said Ben. "If you want to be paid for the ride just

stop now and let me get out—or here's a bun to pay you."

The man took the bun and ate it, the hungry eyes of the girl in the back of the wagon devouring every bite with him.

"Say—p'raps yo' is de young fellar dat got de reward fur findin' de cullud gal dat I read of," said the man.

Ben, though generally afraid of nothing, began to tremble a little when he thought of the money in the wallet; he did not like the look of the man at all.

"Ain't yo' Ben Dewery?" asked the man, not waiting for an answer to his first question.

"I don't see that it's any of your business who I am," said Ben, squaring his shoulders.

"No 'fense, sah," said the man, showing his teeth in a disagreeable smile. "What's dat buttoned inside yo' coat?"

"Nothing," said Ben shortly. The man reached out and touched Ben's coat where he could feel the edges of the wallet.

"Hit feels like er pocketbook," he

said. "What yo' kerry a pocketbook widout no money fur?"

"It's none of your business," said Ben curtly, beginning to be quite frightened. "I think it's warmer to walk," and he grabbed the lines to make the horse stop. But the man was too quick for him, and caught him by the coat collar before he could jump.

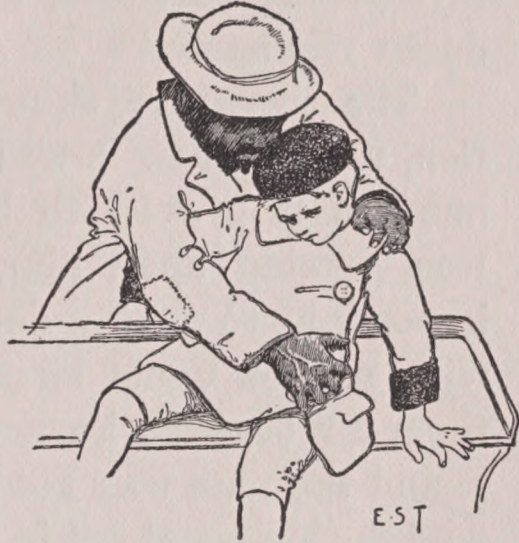
Ben hit out wildly with both fists, but he might as well have tried to move an elephant. The man held him fast, and calling to the girl to hold the reins, he swung Ben over the seat into the back of the wagon, and climbed over himself.

They had entered a lonely stretch of woods, and Ben knew it was useless to call for help. He did call, however; but, after a quick glance around, the man laughed and told him to call louder.

"Now let's see what's in yo' pocket," demanded the darky, trying to unbutton Ben's coat.

"Don't you dare lay hands on me, you old black ruffian!" screamed Ben; but it was of no use to struggle, for with

one motion of his hand the man had unbuttoned the coat, and there was the big wallet in sight. Ben kicked and fought, but he was like a mosquito in the hands of a giant. The man's eyes glistened as he reached for the wallet.



With a super-human effort Ben wrenched himself free from the darky's hold, and, with a flying leap into the air, jumped from the bouncing wagon into a snow-drift, wallet and all.

The jump was a violent one, but the bank of snow was as soft as feathers. In a minute Ben had leaped out into the road, to take to his heels, with his precious wallet safe, when, to his great horror, he saw the man picking himself out of a similar drift thirty feet away. Ben was away like a bird, back on the road

toward friendly Mrs. Small's house; but so was the man, shouting to him to stop, threatening to shoot, and calling him a dozen vile names.

The threat of shooting didn't alarm Ben, for he knew it was probably an idle one—as it proved to be; but the man was gaining upon him. It was almost impossible to make good time running with rubber boots on—he couldn't kick them off because he had no shoes inside—and the man was not fettered by boots. And the long coat got in Ben's way, though he held it up on each side, as Spinner did her dress in crossing a muddy road. It was the first time he had ever felt so helpless, and as he ran on he had thoughts of sympathy for girls in their skirts. He didn't dare stop to throw the coat off, and he would freeze without it, too. He could almost feel the man's breath. What was there to do? He *did* feel his breath!

With a catlike spring Ben dodged to one side, and whipping the wallet out of his pocket, dropped it endwise in a soft snow-bank at the side of the road before



“Come on, uncle!” he called tauntingly.

the man could turn, marking the spot by the oak-tree at its side. Then, as the man turned, he dodged again, passed him, and ran on.

With the wallet safe in the snow-bank, Ben felt a load of responsibility off his mind, and began to enjoy the game.

“Come on, uncle!” he called back, tauntingly. “Hurry up your cakes or you won’t catch me! Come on, Br’er Johnsing, stir your stumps a little! Good exercise on a cold day! You’re as slow as cold molas——”

And just then a heavy hand was laid on his collar and he was lifted clear off his feet.

“Gimme de money!” hissed the man in his ear.

Ben laughed triumphantly, though his teeth chattered.

“I told you I hadn’t any, you thief!” he answered, when the man stopped shaking him.

“Whar’s de pocketbook?” demanded the man, searching Ben’s pockets.

Ben laughed again. “I dropped it in

a snow-bank on the way," he replied, slowly and truthfully, "and you're welcome to look for it." He thought that a safe answer, as they had passed hundreds of drifts.

It took only a minute for the man to see Ben's meaning, and a look of fiendish rage passed over his face.

"Yo' white nigger!" he shouted, "take that—an' that!" and he hit Ben squarely on the head, and again in the face, sending him reeling to the ground. The tinkling of sleigh-bells, which they both might have heard a minute or two before had there been a chance to listen, was now apparently close at hand, and as Ben was knocked to the ground a sleigh made its appearance in the road ahead, and the driver, seeing his plight, whipped up his horses. The colored man took to his heels, back toward Beverly, and Ben, stunned and bleeding, was prostrate in the road.

The man jumped from the sleigh quickly and lifted him.

"Are you much hurt, my lad?" he

asked. "Here, take a drink of this," and he poured some brandy from a flask into Ben's mouth. The stuff burned as he swallowed, but he did as he was bid, and in a minute more he was able to stand by himself.

The colored man was by this time out of sight around the curves in the road, and in a few excited words Ben told the newcomer the principal points in the adventure.

"Then he did not rob you?" asked the owner of the sleigh, helping Ben in.

"No, sir," answered Ben. "I dropped the wallet—it was a big one my father used to have—in a snow-bank when I saw he had to catch me—and he did not see it. I am sure it is all safe, and I must dig it out and go to Beverly at once."

"What is your name?" asked his rescuer. "Where are you from, and how did you happen to have so much money?"

"Benjamin Drury," responded Benny. "And I'm——"

“Oh, you’re one of the Drury boys, are you? I’ve heard my daughter speak of you, and I used to know your father. Why, you’re the boy who earned the reward for finding the little colored girl who strayed away, aren’t you? I’m Prudence Dean’s father.”

“Yes, Mr. Dean,” replied Ben, “and the five hundred dollars is in that pocket-book.”

Mr. Dean whistled. “Well, you’re a clever young man to outwit a thief in that way,” he said. “We will start at once to find the man and the wallet.”

Mr. Dean tucked weary Ben comfortably in the rugs, and drove on. After a few minutes they concluded that one was as easy to find as the other. The man, girl, horse, and wagon had disappeared, making double-quick time into town, judging from the tracks; and as for the wallet—there were hundreds of snow-drifts, and hundreds with oak-trees beside them.

Mr. Dean was kindness itself in helping Ben search through the drifts—far kinder, Ben thought, than he deserved.

“It is too late for the bank now,” said Mr. Dean, after a time of fruitless search. “If you find it you must come home with me and I will keep it safe and deposit it for you in the morning.”

Drift after drift they searched, kicking the snow right and left and brushing it with branches, till both were worn out and stiff with the cold, but no wallet appeared.

“It is unsafe for you to stay here any longer,” said Mr. Dean presently, “with such a blow as the scoundrel gave you. Jump in, my boy, and I will come back with some men and shovels to find it.”

Ben hated to give up, but his strength was leaving him. One more drift and then he would go. It wasn't much use, for the drift was smooth and undisturbed, and Mr. Dean said it was useless to keep on. But the first touch of the branch dislodged the top of the pile, and discovered the edge of the wallet peeping out.

“Hip—hip—hurrah!” cried Ben, turning to Mr. Dean with the gladdest kind of a look in his eyes. Then they both

jumped in the sleigh and drove toward Beverly.

“You would best give me the money, Ben,” said Mr. Dean, “and I will see that it is safe in the bank the first thing in the morning. No—don’t give me the wallet—I’ll put the bills right in mine.”

So Ben took the elastic carefully from the wallet and opened it—’t was empty except for a few old papers!

Where could the money have gone? A few scalding tears would come into his eyes, and in a minute he was crying like any baby, his head on Mr. Dean’s arm.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WEDDING

BEN told Mr. Dean the whole story—how he had yielded to his desire to handle the bills and had placed them in the wallet, and returned too late to get them in the bank; how they had never left his pocket except to be locked in the bureau when he was out; and that no one knew he had them except the cashier at the bank.

“And I *can't* tell Middy—and Jack!” sobbed Ben hysterically, “for it was very wicked and careless of me to have the bills, and—and—I don't know what to do!”

“It was very careless—there's no denying it,” assented Mr. Dean as he patted Ben's shoulder comfortingly. “But cheer up—we'll find it yet. Just let me manage it, my boy. I'm going

to take you right to my house, where Mrs. Dean will rest you up a bit, and I'll send out to stop that man. Are you *sure* everything happened just as you say?"

"Sure—sure's I'm here," replied Ben stoutly.

"Then later I'll drive you home and you can make a thorough search through that drawer of yours, and let me know about it. And I don't believe it will be necessary for you to say anything about the loss yet; it would spoil half the joy of the wedding, as you say."

So Ben went home with Mr. Dean, to be made much of by Mrs. Dean and Prue, Bob and Frank being away. Mr. Dean told his wife the story, adding that he thought probably Ben was so frightened he did not remember exactly what happened; and then started on a search for the colored man, who had driven rapidly through the town some time before.

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The wedding-day was a beautiful, bright sunshiny Wednesday—the doctor

declared that Spinner spun the sunbeams on purpose.

“I’m almost afraid to marry such a very wonderful little woman,” laughed he, early that morning, when he came over—to see Polly, he always said, which made Spinner laugh. “It seems as if she might be entirely a fairy, and that if I should ever even turn a hair the wrong way she might disappear and take the sunshine along with her. Glorious day, eh, Katrine?”

“Oh, yes, you funny doctor!” exclaimed Katrine. “The sun is just bursting—and there you are with an umbrella—but I suppose we mustn’t expect much of you on your wedding-day,” she added with a grown-up air.

“Why not?” blinked the doctor. “I guess there’s just about as much of me as usual, and I don’t mind whispering to you, right in your ear, that I’m stuffed chock full—of joy—and there’s going to be more of me later than you ever saw before—eh, fairy Spinner?” And much to the children’s delight the doctor put

his arm around Cousin Helen's waist, and drawing her over to him, kissed her—"once for Middy and five times for the children." Cousin Helen blushed prettily and tried to make him stop, for they did not usually display their affection before others, but he was like a big unmanageable schoolboy, and insisted upon doing as he pleased.

"'Oo tan't tiss Powy's Spinner," said Polly, screwing up her little mouth and pulling the doctor's hand away from Cousin Helen. "Powy wants all tisses."

"And the umbrella," continued the doctor, letting Cousin Helen go, and tossing Polly to his shoulder, "is not for me. It is for you, Katrine, to protect yourself with this afternoon."

"For *me?*" cried Katrine. "Why, it can't *possibly* rain to-day."

"You'll need it at the wedding," asserted the doctor gravely, his eyes twinkling all the while. "I was afraid that new frock of yours would be spoiled with tears, so bought you the umbrella to protect it. Spinner, she's jealous—jealous as

an—an owl. I don't think that quotation sounds just right, but it will do."

"Why?" asked Spinner.

"*Why?*" repeated the doctor mockingly. "Why, that is as plain as the nose on your face. I'll whisper it to you"—which he did in a loud stage whisper: "She wanted me herself!"

"The very idea!" laughed Katrine. "I wouldn't want to manage you unless I had a very large salary for it."

"Hush!" cried the doctor. "You may hurt my future wife's feelings. I'll confide in you, however, Katrine, that I had to offer her very high wages before she consented to——"

"It's time you were off," interrupted Cousin Helen, laughing. "If you don't stop carrying on I may refuse you yet."

"Horrible, horrible thought!" cried the doctor in mock dismay. "Promise me, Katrine, that if Miss Spinner here fails to turn up at the right moment in church, you will take her place. But I forgot. My errand is wedding presents,"

and he slowly took several packages from his pocket. "This is to assist your Middy, Ben, at the ceremony; hand it to her. I hope it is big enough to dry her tears." It was a beautiful lace handkerchief. "Jack, if you dare let any one be a second late at the church, I'll take this watch right back."

"Oh, doctor!" was all the surprised Jack could gasp, as he received the coveted new watch. "Thank——"

"And, Ben," continued the doctor, not waiting to hear the end of Jack's speech of thanks, "start right in this minute, and write down everything you've got to do to-day in this diary—and don't forget to do it. And put down in the largest letters you can make, 'Spinner married to *ME* to-day at five o'clock,' for we'll all be sure to forget the date right away—eh, Spinner? Here, sir, take this stylographic pen to go with it, and don't, for pity's sake, let your Cousin Spinner mistake the book for her prayer-book, and get those blank pages in church this afternoon, and——"

“As if she hadn’t studied the service, word for word, every day the last week,” interrupted Katrine.

“—and so fail to get properly married,” finished the doctor. “And the next time you want neckties, Sir Charlie, don’t swap off your baby sister for a gaudy purple one, as I believe you’re in the habit of doing, but just press the secret spring on this box and say the magic words, ‘Open Sesame’—see?—and pick out the kind you want. And, little Polly, here’s something for you to love when the naughty ‘tousin-doctor’ runs away with your dear Spinner. See, she has beautiful golden hair, almost like Spinner’s, and brown eyes and red cheeks.” Polly clasped the new doll in one hand, but still looked lovingly at the old rag doll under the other arm. “Katrine, here’s a bottle of cologne for Topsy, on condition she never gets herself lost again—and good-by till this afternoon!”

The doctor ran for the door to evade the exclamations of thanks that his stream of words had prevented.

"You've left Spinner out, Dr. McKinney," called Charlie. "Where's hers?"

"Why, she gets the biggest one of all this afternoon," he called back over his shoulder. "She gets *me*."

"Isn't he ridiculous!" exclaimed Spinner, and "Isn't he splendid!" cried the others.

"He is the most generous man I ever saw," said Middy. "No one but the doctor would have thought to reverse the usual way of giving wedding presents."

Spinner was blushing with pleasure. "*I* think he's a little out of the ordinary," she said.

The rest of the day was a very busy, merry time. The boys, under the direction of Mr. Manning and Kendrick Munn, finished the dressing of the church which they had begun the day before. It looked very pretty indeed, with the greens fresh from the woods, and sumac and bitter-sweet berries, contributed by the neighbors, to relieve the green.

Katrine, as well as the boys, had her

hands full, as did her mother, Cousin Helen, and Miss Madge Winters; not to mention Topsy, Hester, and Mammy Rose, who had been loaned for this occasion. Katrine and Hester had entire charge of the doctor's house. Cousin Helen was not to be admitted until she came back from church as Mrs. McKinney. Katrine called the doctor's house the "Web," to distinguish it from the "Nest."

At last everything was ready, the houses prettily decorated with greens and flowers, and every one was excitedly waiting for five o'clock to come. Even Ben had almost forgotten his troubles; if the family had not been so preoccupied with the wedding, they would surely have noticed how quiet and unlike his usual jolly self "Laughing Ben" was. He made up his mind he must tell Middy—he couldn't bear it any longer; but with a great effort he restrained himself until the wedding should be over. Sally had arrived, dressed in her dainty white frock and pink ribbons, her brown curls tied demurely in place, and Paul, in his spick and span

black suit, with a great white rose in his buttonhole; and they were all gathered in the sitting-room, waiting for the bride to come down-stairs. It didn't look a bit like the sitting-room, somehow, in all its wedding finery. The children felt as if they were in a strange place, and everything was quiet for a time.

In a few minutes Cousin Helen came slowly down the stairs, with Topsy, full of importance and clad in a wonderful new gown of many colors and a white cap, holding the long train. Spinner was a very beautiful bride. Her mother's wedding-dress fell in folds of softly shining satin; and her long veil, caught back with a delicate spray of lilies of the valley, framed her sweet rosy face and golden hair. She had the doctor's present, a wonderful pin of diamonds and pearls, at her throat. Katrine said she was *too* beautiful; and as for Topsy, she couldn't help making a courtesy every time Cousin Helen looked in her direction.

There was a sad little pause for a minute after the expressions of admiration

had ceased, until Spinner broke it with a laugh.

“You have all been very good to me, my dear friends and cousins,” she said, with a little quiver in her voice, “and I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart. And I want you all to kiss Helen Cubberly for the last time.”

The maid of honor, very sweet in a pale-pink dress, and Katrine in her white with blue ribbons, were trying to persuade little Polly that Jemima Jane could not go to the church; it looked as if trouble were ahead, for Polly would not be separated from her beloved doll, the much-begrimed Jemima Jane, whose arms, emptied of their stuffing, hung limp and loose, and whose face was so dirty it was almost impossible to tell whether you were looking at it or at the back of her head. But Polly loved her with a passionate love.

“Let Jemima go to church if she will be very good,” said Cousin Helen, lifting Polly, regardless of the beautiful wedding gown, and giving her a long loving kiss.

And then aside to Topsy and Katrine: "But be sure you take Jemima away and give her the basket of flowers in the church—she will be so excited then she will forget all about the doll."

Just as Middy was fixing Cousin Helen's veil, an engine whistled and pulled into the station, and a jolly party of six or eight people got off the train. On asking if they could get carriages, they were told by the station agent that "every carriage for miles around is bein' used at the doc's weddin'."

"Is it far to the church?" asked one young man.

"Half a mile," was the reply; and so the party made use of shanks' mare to help them on their way.

One, a tall young woman with dark eyes and hair, walked with the man who had inquired.

"Of all the odd things, Harry, this is the oddest—to think of my chaperoning the girls, and then running into you and your friends on the train by mere chance. I wish John could have come—hadn't

you heard that I married John Bryce last December? Yes, indeed, I'm an old married woman now. And Helen hasn't an idea that we're anywhere near. She just wrote she was to be married quietly, and we made up our minds it couldn't be done properly unless *we* were here, so we came up. I was married to Dr. Bryce out in Indiana, where he had charge of a hospital—I'm thankful to say he is back home again now, but I just couldn't get along without him, so I had to go out there, and we were married ever so quietly. So you see, since I cheated the girls out of a wedding, they resolved Helen should not do the same thing, and as it wasn't very hard to persuade me to come, here we are."

Mr. Harry Cortelyou said he and his friends had come from New York unexpectedly, too, to help the doctor get properly married.

"And another reason I was anxious to come," said Mrs. Bryce, "is that we became much interested in a little colored girl who wandered away from home and

turned up in our hospital; she was a wild little thing and told many queer stories. We finally returned her to this very town to the people she had strayed away from—Drury was the name—and I just happened to hear that Helen's cousin's name is Drury, and think perhaps it is the very same family."

What flustered ushers those were when they saw such handsomely dressed and well-bred strangers come in! Who could they be and where had they come from? They certainly had never been in Cicero before. They were no sooner seated than the wedding march began and the procession started, led by the four young ushers, looking spick and span, with white roses in their button-holes—and "good enough to eat," as one old lady whispered to her neighbor. They were followed by Sally and Katrine, both carrying bunches of roses, then Miss Madge, and next Polly and—alack and alas—Jemima Jane!

Just as she was about to start Polly discovered that she had a basket of roses

and not her beloved Jemima. She looked around wildly, her lips trembled, two tears sprang into her eyes, and she opened her mouth to scream, when she saw Jemima Jane behind the nearest pillar. So she just swallowed the shriek that was about to come out of her little rosebud mouth, caught the tears back into her blue eyes, and exchanged the flowers for Jemima, without any one noticing her. Then she walked demurely along, hugging her dear old dolly, and crooning a contented lullaby to the tune of the wedding march. Too late, Mammy and Topsy caught sight of her; the bride had started on the arm of Mr. Manning's brother, who was to give her away.



“Yo’ li’l’ no ’count nigger!” Mammy whispered excitedly to Topsy. “W’y didn’ yo’ watch de baby? Yo’ Mammy’s turnin’ plum white wid modification!”

CHAPTER XIX

A CONFESSION

THE service was over in a few minutes —Charlie said afterward he was sure it was two hours, for he was so tired of standing by the groom, and he didn't dare even to move an eye-winker. Then, after the benediction, the procession moved slowly down the aisle, the bride and groom looking very happy, the ushers and bridesmaids very important, Charlie a little relieved, and Polly quite tired of the proceedings, and dragging Jemima Jane by one leg. She smiled at all the friends she knew in the congregation as she marched along.

“What do you suppose the people thought?” cried Katrine to Miss Madge and Sally, as they drove to the house. “It was just too bad; and I don't see how under the sun she ever got Jemima

again after I hid her and gave her the roses. There were a lot of strangers there too—they looked like city people—who do you suppose they were?”

“They may have been driving through town,” said Miss Madge. “However, if they belong to us, we will see them at the reception.”

And sure enough they did. Topsy’s eyes grew as big as saucers when she opened the door and beheld Mrs. Bryce.

“Do you remember me, Topsy?” she asked, holding out her daintily gloved hand.

“Does I ’member yo’?” asked Topsy; “I ain’ neber fo’gotten yo’, Mis’ Nangel,” and without waiting to even show them indoors, Topsy turned and ran for Katrine. Unfortunately she ran plump into Mammy, who promised her a “reasoning with” for her rude behavior to the guests. But she would not be stopped, and ran on for Katrine, telling her in an excited whisper that “Mis’ Nangel she’s outside, an’ she done come all de way from Indiany what I done tole yo’ ’bout,

Mis' 'Trine. Hurry up, or she gwine spread her wings an' fly, 'ca'se she must er come dat a-way."

When Katrine reached the door, she found Cousin Helen warmly welcoming the new guests; and what a surprise it was to see all these old friends who had come so far to see her married, and how happy she was that the doctor's college friends were equally thoughtful!

You may be sure that the reception was a huge success, for every soul who was invited came and enjoyed it immensely; even Miss Prim, from next door, who, as Jack said, was kind enough to leave "a few of her feet" at home. The caterer was a little worried about the provisions holding out, but fortunately there was just enough to go around without stinting even Topsy and Mammy Rose. Topsy, superintended by Mammy, was the most competent little waitress. The two houses accommodated all the guests, who were received by Spinner and the doctor in the newly furnished parlor of the doctor's house. Spinner was very

much delighted with the changes made, and praised Jack and Katrine unsparingly.

"Katrine is a wonderful worker," she told Mrs. Bryce, "and the most competent girl for her age I ever saw. She can do the most beautiful cooking and sewing—it quite puts mine to shame—and she can turn her hand to anything, in fact." Then she told Mrs. Bryce about "Jack and Company," and their brave work, which interested the Southerner very much.

"I only wish my small sister, Phyllis, could do one-half the things you can," said Mrs. Bryce to the blushing Katrine. "We must arrange to have you meet, so that you can set her a good example. She is just about your size, but she thinks more of having a good time than of anything else."

"It is just fun with us," said Katrine modestly, "and she would think so too, if she tried it."

"Very much depends on the way one looks at it," smiled Cousin Helen. "If

we are prepared for drudgery we can easily make drudges of ourselves; but if we are prepared to see enjoyment in everything we do, we can get a great deal of pleasure out of our lives. We will ask Phyllis up to help us some time soon. Now that I have this big house we shall have plenty of room to spill over from the 'Nest' into the 'Web.'"

"And Phyllis will be glad to see Topsy, too; I wrote her all about the little girl in the hospital; and I must write, too, about the reward Ben earned by finding her."

"And about his giving the money away as a college fund for me, too," added Jack, anxious to give Ben his dues. Poor Ben!

Every one seemed happy; the doctor apparently more so than any one. He told Katrine the only thing that spoiled his pleasure was that if he were really as black as Katrine painted him, he was very sorry for Spinner.

"And now," he cried, offering his arm to Cousin Helen, after most of the guests

were gone (all except the Southern ladies and the doctor's chums, who were persuaded to stay overnight and be housed by some of the kind neighbors), "allow me, Mrs. McKinney, to escort you upon your wedding tour. The wedding party is respectfully invited to accompany. You see, Harry, Mrs. McKinney and I took our real wedding trip at the time she asked me to marry her——"

"You wretch!" exclaimed Spinner, laughing. "I never did. In fact, I tried my best to make you stay at home, but you were stubborn."

"—and so," the doctor continued, "the only journey we're going on to-night is through this old house of ours to see how Jack and Company, especially Jill here"—pulling one of Katrine's pigtails—"have rejuvenated it."

So off the whole crowd started, Middy, looking quite white and tired, leaning on Jack's arm. The solemn old house, which Hester had kept darkened for so many years, was certainly rejuvenated, as the doctor had said, and all was bright

and beautiful. The walls had been freshly papered and painted, hardwood floors laid in several rooms, the beautiful old furniture which had belonged to Dr. McKinney's grandmother was polished up, and an air of brightness and harmony given everything by the taste displayed in the arrangement of the new furnishings with the old.

"Every piece of wall-paper—every curtain—everything new, in fact, was selected through the good taste of Miss Katrine here," said the doctor, "and I want to say that I will give her a very handsome recommendation if——"

A startled exclamation from Jack interrupted his sentence. Middy had quietly fainted away.

A sad and weary time followed. Dear Middy had not known one of her children for a week. She had lain in a sort of stupor ever since the wedding-night, when Jack and the doctor had lifted her tenderly, and had laid her on the bed in Cousin Helen's pretty new room. Doctor

McKinney had called in several prominent physicians to consult over the case, and each one had looked very grave and had shaken his head.

Spinner had donned a nurse's costume once more, and an experienced trained nurse had been telegraphed for to come to her relief.

"The crisis must occur before to-morrow at this time," Jack overheard the doctor say to Spinner, "and it is impossible to tell what the result will be—but—the children may need you more than ever."

That evening after supper, when the nurse had gone back to the sick-room, Spinner came over to the other house and called the children into the sitting-room.



Katrine had just undressed Polly and put her in her little trundle-bed, and was helping the sleepy Charlie undo the but-

tons that troubled him so much. She finished with him, and then tucking him in, and bestowing a good-night kiss, closed the door and ran down to Cousin Helen. Jack, with his books on the table before him, was pretending to study, and Ben—poor unhappy Ben!—was trying to write in his diary. They could think of nothing but Middy—dear Middy, who was the center of the little home and who was so very, very ill.

Cousin Helen sat in Middy's big chair, with Katrine and Ben each on a stool at her feet, all eager to hear the verdict of the two physicians.

"My dear, dear little cousins," she said, her sweet sad smile but a shadow of her usual joyous laugh, "poor Middy is still unconscious, and the two great doctors, who have been here all the afternoon, are as uncertain about what turn matters will take, as is our own dear doctor. They say the crisis will be within twenty-four hours, and that there is only a chance that our dear Middy will ever regain consciousness, and be able to speak

with us again." Cousin Helen's brimming eyes rested lovingly on the three heads, Jack's buried in his hands on the table and Katrine's in her lap. Ben was sitting bolt upright, trying to hold back the tears that would come. The continual remembrance of the terrible secret he had hidden from his mother and from every one had made him extremely unhappy, and now—now the dear Middy was so ill and perhaps—perhaps he would never have a chance to tell her how wicked he had been. With a great sob he, too, buried his face in Cousin Helen's lap.

"Oh, Spinner, Spinner, I've been so wicked!—and Middy never knew. What *shall* I do?"

"Benny dear, we have none of us always done right," said Spinner, stroking the frowzy head which was shaking with sobs, "and dear Middy would be the first one to comfort and forgive."

"But—I—I am dishonest!" sobbed Ben, "and—and——"

"Dishonest?" asked Cousin Helen

gently. "Tell me what you mean, Benny."

"I—I can't," sobbed Ben. "You—and Jack—and Katrine will—will hate me."

"Why, Benny!" said Katrine, raising a tearful face and putting her arm around him. "We couldn't help loving you, never mind what you did."

"I st—stole five hundred—dollars!" gasped Ben, "and—and I've got to tell now even if you never speak to me again, and—and Jack—oh, Jack—you—you can't go to—to college 'cause the money's gone." And with many sobs Ben told his story.

"And I've been so miserable—and I couldn't tell—and spoil your wedding, Spinner, and—and since Middy has been sick it seems as if it would kill me—to let Jack know without her."

Jack had left the table and was down on his knees beside Benny.

"Poor old Ben!" he whispered. "You have had a hard time, and you are a brave old fellow to stand it so long alone. It

was noble of you to want me to go to college with your money, and it *was* your money, you know, so you couldn't steal it. I'm so sorry you have lost it, but perhaps it will turn up yet. Don't worry, old man, we can make it up somehow; and—and Ben, I don't love you one bit less, but *more* for being so brave about it. We will not tell Middy about it till—till she gets entirely well."

Jack gave a great gulp to down that queer choking sensation in his throat.

Ben's sobs became quieter, and one hand stole out to clasp Jack's ready hand. He had not dreamed that the big brother would forgive him so readily, for he realized the dreadful disappointment it was for Jack to again give up going to college.

"And the colored man has not yet been found?" asked Cousin Helen.

"No," said Ben. "He must have it, because I've searched and searched everywhere for it—all along the road, over and over, and in my bureau, where the wallet was for a little while. Mr. Dean says if

we can only get the man, we can probably frighten him into telling about it. I wish we *could* get the scoundrel!"

Ben's confession relieved the strain under which he had been for so long, but it was almost forgotten in the thought of Middy and the morrow. The two boys went up to bed later with arms entwined, and left Cousin Helen and Katrine to talk about Middy, until Spinner said they would need all their strength for to-morrow, and insisted that Katrine should go to bed and to sleep.

CHAPTER XX

A RECOVERY AND A DISCOVERY

A LONG and dreary day followed. The children spoke in whispers, and moved softly on tiptoe, too sad and worried to go about their usual work. Charlie and Polly played in a listless way for a while, but even little Polly felt that a great crisis was at hand, and finally nestled down in Katrine's lap in Middy's chair, her big eyes full of unshed tears, and murmuring, "Powy's poor sick Middy; Powy 'oves 'oo."

Every few minutes one of them would steal softly into the other house, and listen in breathless silence for sounds from upstairs; and once in a while Spinner, pale and sad, would come in to cheer their waiting, and report that the crisis had not yet come.

The two great doctors were up-stairs

with Dr. McKinney, waiting for the dreaded moment which would tell them whether Mrs. Drury might be nursed back to health and strength once more, or whether Jack and Company would be deprived of the loving mother, counselor, and friend.

Spinner and the nurse were there too, except when Spinner stole softly down to tell the children there was hope yet. Once she almost fell over a little black bundle huddled in a corner of the staircase. It was Topsy, crying her eyes out for love of the gentle mistress up-stairs—her “Queen.” Cousin Helen led her tenderly down to the sitting-room, and comforted her with the others. And Mammy was there too; she had come early in the morning to be with her “bresséd lambs.”

“De good Lord, he ain’ gwine tek Mis’ Lucy away f’om we all,” she stoutly declared. “Ef dere’s any one ter go, hit’s time fer Mammy Rose ter go first. Stop yo’ sniffin’, Topsy Pink, an’ tek Polly out in de kitchin an’ ’muse her. Run

back up-stairs ag'in, Mis' Helen, honey. Mammy 'll set right down here wid de chillen an' tell 'em 'bout ole Virginny times w'en Mis' Lucy was a li'l' gal, an' den de time 'll pass quicker, an'—an' we 'll wait fo' yo' to tell us what de doctors says."

So Cousin Helen went back to the sick-room again, and Mammy told about the dear old Southern home, how "ole Mistis an' Marse dey wuz mighty proud one fine day w'en de good Lord done mek dey a presen' ob a weenty baby, an' de baby hit war Mis' Lucy—jes' natcherly so much like Polly dat yo' couldn't tole de diffruns—'cept Polly she more robust. An' dey tuk de bestest keer ob dat baby till she done got ter be fifteen, an' she wuz jes' de sweetes' an' bes' li'l' gal allus, an' all de niggers done worship eben her shoes. An' den one day come along a smart-lookin' Yankee to see ole Marse, an' I reck'n he done fall plum' in lub wid Mis' Lucy from de fust, fo' he war a-comin' an' a-comin' to de house all de time, an' he play an' romp wid Mis' Lucy at fust, an'

den he tease her, an' tell her ef she put on long skirts she cyarn' run no mo'; an' den, arter waitin' years fo' Mis' Lucy to mek up her mine she doan' wan' ter marry none o' de young marsed f'om de Souf, she up an' come to ole black Mammy one day, an' she say: 'Mammy, ef yo' lubbed a man, a No'thener, would yo' marry him?' 'Bress yo' pretty eyes, honey,' says Mammy, 'dey ain' no No'th nor no Souf, an' ef yo' lubs him 's much as yo' does yo' own pa an' ma, tek him an' be happy.' An' so yo' pa he come along jes' den, an' he oberhear what Mammy say, an' he mek her repeat it, wid po' Mis' Lucy standin' dere lookin' like de sunset, an' den he say, '*Will* yo' tek him, Mis' Lucy?' an' Mis' Lucy she so flustrated she cyarn' do nuthin' but hide her face in he coat. An'——"

Mammy stopped suddenly, for there stood the nurse in the doorway.

"Mrs. Drury is conscious at last," she said, "and she is asking for the children. The doctors say you may all come up for a moment. You must be very careful,

for the least excitement may turn the tide which is now in her favor."

Jack with Ben, and Katrine with Charlie, went up the stairs and into the room as quietly as little mice, and there was dear Middy, pale and wan, her eyes eagerly watching the door for them. She was strong enough only to smile feebly as they stood quietly inside the door, and then she contentedly closed her eyes and dozed off into a gentle sleep.

The crisis was past, and Jack and Company still had a loving mother.

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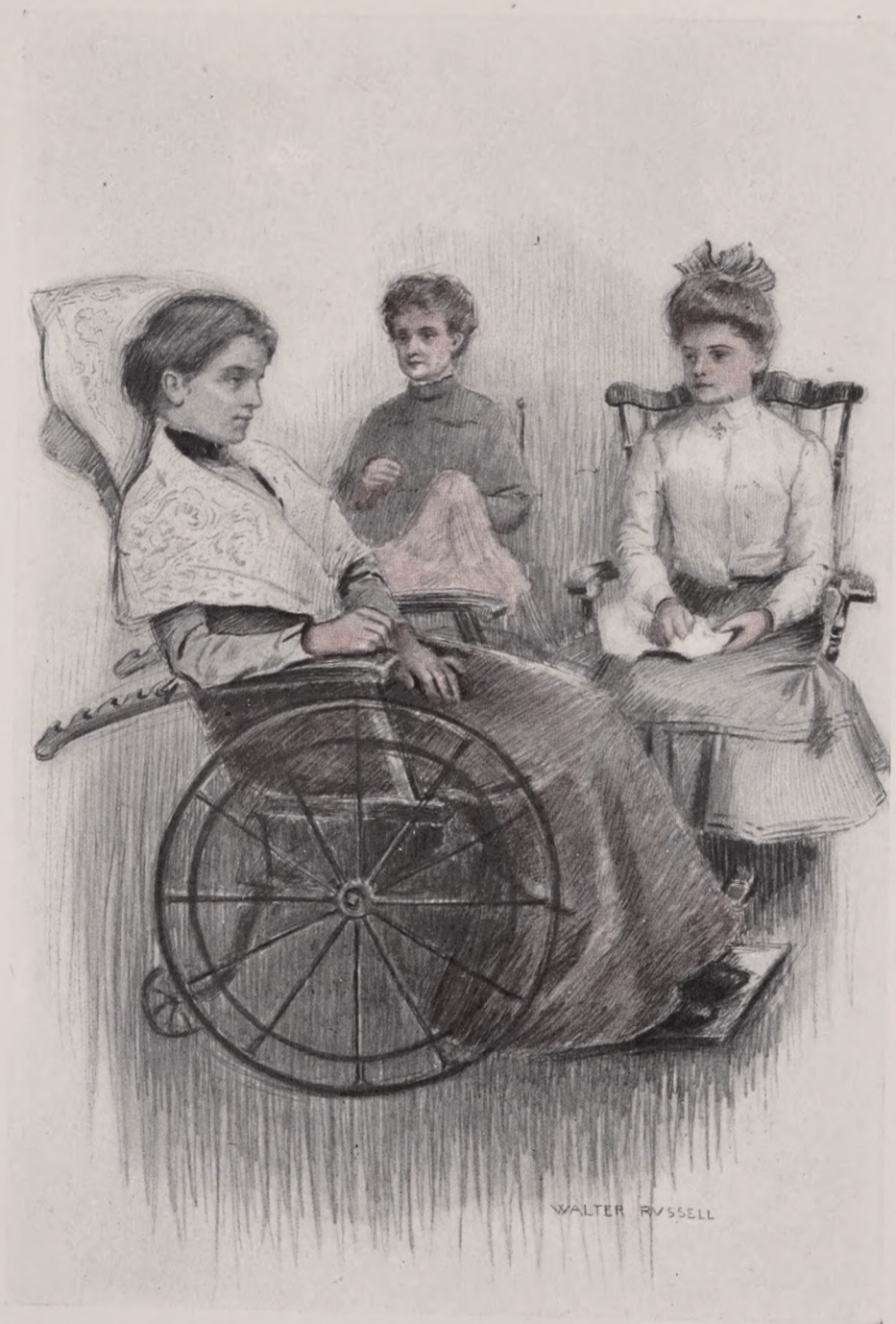
The long weeks of convalescence were weeks of joy to the children, now permitted to wait upon their mother, who, though always very dear, had never seemed quite so precious before. They went about their work with light hearts and nimble fingers. Ben hid his grief that his mother did not know about the loss of the money, and Jack hid his.

The supposed thief had not been arrested, and no amount of search revealed the missing money. Perhaps Sally and

Paul showed even more disappointment than the Drurys ; but they were very kind, indeed, to poor Ben, and sympathized with him instead of blaming him. Every one became interested in the case, and every one was kind enough to help in searching until the search was given up for lack of some new place to look for the money or the man. Both seemed to have disappeared entirely from the country.

Winter had gone, and spring had begun to coax forth the tender little leaves and blades of grass, before Middy knew of the loss. She was still weak, and spent most of the time in a wheel-chair which Mrs. Winters had kindly lent. Cousin Helen and Katrine were sewing busily.

“Ben is growing more manly every day,” said Middy. “He is not the careless, thoughtless boy he was last year, and I think his work has been good for him. His generosity with his money pleased me so much ; it is a never-failing bit of joy to think that Jack can really go to college, and I am sure he will make the very best



Then Cousin Helen told the story.

use of his opportunities." Spinner and Katrine looked at each other, and Middy saw the glance they exchanged. "What is the matter?" she asked quickly.

Then Cousin Helen told the story from the very beginning, and just as she finished the three boys came in for luncheon—the four boys, Katrine would have said, because the doctor came with them.

"My dear little son!" was all Middy said, as she drew Ben's curly head to her shoulder and kissed him. "To think that you did not have your mother to help you bear your burden!"

Ben buried his face and sobbed for a few minutes, while Middy said comforting words, and the doctor shook his head. He did not approve of anything but smiles, especially where invalids were concerned.

"Why, I declare! I almost forgot that the mail had come in and brought you some letters," he said, to change the subject. "Here's one for Middy—and, *who* is it dares write to you, Miss Katrine, without first asking *my* permission? And

it is postmarked Richmond, too. I believe I would better open it and read it first."

"Never!" cried Katrine, dashing for him and rescuing her letter, addressed in a strange hand, and, sure enough, postmarked Richmond.



"What *do* you think!" she and Middy, who had both opened their letters, cried at once. "It's an invitation to——"

"One at once," ordered the doctor, holding up both hands in protest. "Whose wedding is it this time? Mrs. Middy has the floor."

"Mine is an invitation to go abroad with Amy Van Wagonen, a distant cousin," said Middy, bright spots of excitement appearing in her cheeks. "Did you ever hear of such kindness, Helen?"

"And mine," Katrine fairly shouted, not giving her mother time to explain further, "is an invitation to visit Mrs.

Bryce and her sister, Phyllis Blair. Oh, *how* I wish I might go!"

"Well, I declare!" exclaimed the doctor. "You and I are left out of this, Spinner—it really isn't fair. Katrine can't go, of course," he went on teasingly.

"Oh, I just *wish* I could!" cried Katrine; and then she sighed, for she knew her duty was laid out for her at home. "Tell us about Mrs. Van Wagonen's letter, Middy, dear."

"Would a sea voyage be good for her, doctor?" asked Jack eagerly.

"The very best thing in the world," he replied. "Just what I should have prescribed if I had known there was the slightest chance of my advice being taken."

"I don't see how I can possibly go," said Middy slowly. "Why, it's only—Let me see, what does she say? 'We are to sail on the Fuerst Bismarck three weeks from this Saturday, and as George'—that is Dr. Van Wagonen—is to be very busy on this trip and most of the time we're away, he makes it a condition

of my going that I take a friend with me to keep me from being lonesome. And I have selected you as my companion. The trip will do you good, and as we are going by easy stages, and George is very careful about traveling, you will be safe, and your family need not worry one bit. Do write me that you will go.'—She doesn't seem to have heard of my last illness at all."

"I'll write her at once that you'll be ready," cried Spinner.

"No—no, I can not go and leave my little flock," said Middy, opening her arms lovingly to let them draw closer to her. "Where I go they must go too."

"But they can't go abroad," said the doctor seriously, "and this invitation is just in the nick of time for you. Such a change may result in your being with them for many more years than would otherwise be possible. A change is imperative for you—I told Helen so only this morning. And as for the children, you know we stand ready to be mother and father to them as far as is possible.

I know Dr. Van Wagonen by reputation, and he will take the very best care of you."

After a great deal of talking, planning, and persuading, the letter accepting Mrs. Van Wagonen's invitation was written and mailed, and then the other invitation was to be considered.

Mrs. Bryce wrote a very urgent letter, saying that her sister Phyllis had not been very well, and that she had been taken from school, and had a tutor at home. Ever since Mrs. Bryce's visit to Cicero she had been begging to have Katrine visit her; she had fallen in love with the description given her of the Drury family. And so Katrine was urged to come and stay as long as she "possibly could." A pass on the railroad for the whole journey was enclosed.

"I don't see why she can not go," said Spinner. "I should love to take care of Polly and help the boys, and I think we can get along famously.—Don't you, boys?"

"You bet!" cried Charlie vigorously;

and then: "Please excuse me, Middy. I forgot you didn't like that; I won't say it again."

"Indeed we can!" cried Ben and Jack, and Polly also acquiesced with a "'deed we tan," which made them all laugh. She was sitting on the floor with beloved Jemima Jane, alternately rocking and kissing her, and trying to pull the rags from a large rip in her body.

"May I go, Middy? Isn't Cousin Helen just too dear for words?" And Katrine jumped up and down in her excitement, and kissed first Middy and then Spinner, and then Middy again.

"Perhaps it can be arranged," assented Middy, while Spinner said, "Of course."

Just then Topsy's head popped in at the door.

"Bofe lunches am ready," she announced, "an' Hester says ef yo' all's ain't gwine come mighty quick she done unsot de table ag'in." And she disappeared before she could be reproved for repeating Hester's message word for word.

So the cavalcade started, leaving Middy alone, with the exception of Jemima Jane. Ben stopped at his mother's bidding to hand a needle and thread to sew up poor Jemima's rib before Polly should pull any more stuffing out.

"Geewhimakins!" exclaimed Ben as, after handing the needle, he examined Jemima's long wound. "Gee-whim-a-kins, Middy! Look here!" and he burst out laughing and crying at the same time.

Sticking from the hole was the end of a one-hundred-dollar bill, and further search revealed four other crisp bills, rolled and crumpled and stuffed into poor—or rich—Jemima Jane!

CHAPTER XXI

SOME DETECTIVE WORK AND—GOOD-BY

THE hubbub that followed the discovery of Jemima Jane's theft was almost deafening. Ben was nearly beside himself with joy, and if his mother had not been well on the highroad to recovery, the bearlike hugs and shouts of pleasure would certainly have been the worst thing in the world for her. She was speechless with amazement, and before she could even get her breath to exclaim, the family came racing back to see what was the matter. Jack and the doctor had each grabbed a rug as he ran, thinking of fire, and Spinner and Katrine, immediately thinking of burglars, had an umbrella and the fire-tongs. Hester followed Cousin Helen with the water-pitcher in readiness for either, and Topsy, smelling some excitement as every one pre-

cipitately rushed away from instead of toward the dining-room, left her toasting and dashed for the sitting-room next door, the toaster still smoking hot in one hand and a big wooden spoon in the other.

"Where is it?" shouted the doctor.

"Where is he?" called Katrine and Charlie.

"What is it?" screamed Jack.

"What is the matter?" gasped Spinner. "Is it——"

"Ketch him—ketch him—ketch him!" sang Topsy, excitedly hopping up and down, her little black pigtails bobbing like so many blades of grass in the wind.

Ben caught Jack around the waist and whirled him about the room.

"You can go—you can at last!" he shouted. "It's found—found—found!"

"Here, young man, quiet down a bit, and tell us what's the matter," said the doctor gruffly, grabbing Ben by the collar. "I should think your reason was lost instead of found."

"Behold the cause of Ben's apparent

craziness!" cried Mrs. Drury, as she exhibited the long-lost money.

And then there was a regular dance of joy by the whole family, with an accompaniment of Indian-like war-whoops.

"Where under the clouds did they come from?" asked Katrine, as they all gathered about Middy's chair to hear the mystery explained.

"Behold the thief!" said Middy solemnly, holding Jemima Jane up in front of her.



A shout of laughter greeted this and Middy's explanation, until Polly, seeing that her beloved Jemima Jane was being laughed at, poked both chubby fists into her eyes and burst into tears.

"Here is dolly, sweet. Middy would not take her dolly away, darling. See what Jemima Jane has given Middy."

Polly took her hands out of her eyes long enough to see that Jemima was safe, and then catching sight of the money, she stopped crying, and picking up one bill from Middy's lap she snatched Jemima and hurriedly crumpled the bill and poked it into her body.

"Did you ever!" exclaimed Spinner. "How could they have gotten in there—how could Polly have found them? Polly, dear, where did you find all these pretty green things?" But Polly disdained an answer. "Where could she have found them, Ben?"

"Goodness only knows!" cried Ben perplexedly. And then: "I wonder—I wonder if she could have found them that night? I think—yes, I'm quite sure—now it all comes back to me—I left the wallet in my pocket when I went to bed, and she almost always comes in the room to wake us, you know."

"Let's try a piece of detective work," suggested Jack. "Give me your wallet, Benny." Jack put the bills carefully in the wallet and pulled the loose elastic

about it. "Now watch." He put the wallet on the chair in front of Polly, and every one waited in breathless silence to see the next move.

Polly was contentedly walking off with Jemima Jane when she caught sight of the wallet, and she seemed to recognize it as an old friend. Putting Jemima down, she seized the wallet, and with a little cry of delight sat down on the floor and pulled the rubber this way and that till the wallet fell open. Then she pulled the bills out, felt of them, and, looking about for some convenient place to put them, she discovered Jemima Jane; and, to the wonder of them all, she calmly stuffed the bills one after another into Jemima's capacious side, unconscious that every one was watching her.

Jack pulled Katrine back, whispering "Wait," as she started to catch Polly, who now had risen from the floor again and was playing with the wallet on the chair. By some chance, or perhaps her baby skill, the rubber slipped back in place, and the wallet looked undisturbed.

"There!" cried the detective. "What do you think of that?"

"I should call that conclusive proof that we have an accomplished thief right in our midst," said the doctor solemnly. "Here, miss, let me take that money at once or you'll hide it again, and then Jack will have another disappointment about college. I vote myself a committee of one to take charge of this money. Who seconds the motion?"

"I!" cried every one else, as the doctor pocketed the money and led the way down to luncheon.

Three weeks later Spinner and the doctor, Polly and the boys, gathered at the station to bid farewell to the travelers. It was very hard, now that the time had really come, to let Middy go for so long a time, but they all bravely faced the parting and tried to be cheerful.

There had been three weeks of the hurriedest kind of scurry to get Middy and Katrine ready, for Katrine was to go part of the way with Middy; then she

would be met by one of Mrs. Bryce's friends and change cars for Richmond, while Mr. Kendrick Munn would see Middy safe on the steamer. New clothes had to be fashioned out of old ones, in the marvelous way some clever people are masters of, and when everything was ready no one would have known they were not spick and span from the shops.

The boys had resolved to carry on the business as far as possible, though Jack had a deal of studying to do in order to pass his college examinations, and Charlie and Ben were to continue at school. Topsy was to keep house under Cousin Helen's supervision, and she had solemnly promised her "Queen" to be "de bestest li'l' nigger dat eber live, an' take keer of Polly 's ef she war a nangel—dough I spec's my heart'll clean bust widout Mis' 'Trine."

Just before the train puffed in, shouts came from two wagons driving hurriedly toward the station, and almost before they stopped, out jumped the March Hares pell-mell, to wish Katrine good

luck and to present her with the badge of membership—a pin with a mad hare jumping out of a hat the Hatter must surely have worn, it looked so much like the one in the picture.

Mammy Rose could not let her “bressed lambs” go without a “God-speed” from her, so she begged permission to come too; and there she was, with tears of joy or sorrow, you couldn’t tell which, starting from her eyes.



Good-bys were hurriedly said as the train thundered in, and promises of good

behavior were made to dear Middy who was to be gone for so long.



“Hip-hip-hurrah! three cheers for Jack and Company!” cried Paul, and the Hares cheered with a will. “Three cheers and good luck for Jack’s sister!” cried Paul again. And then, “And three times three cheers, and a fine trip, for Jack’s mother!” as the train pulled out, amid a terrific cheering and waving of hats and handkerchiefs.

THE END

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